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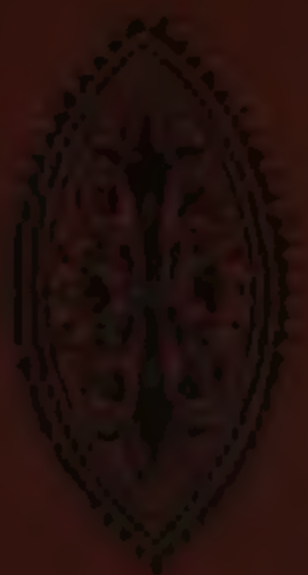
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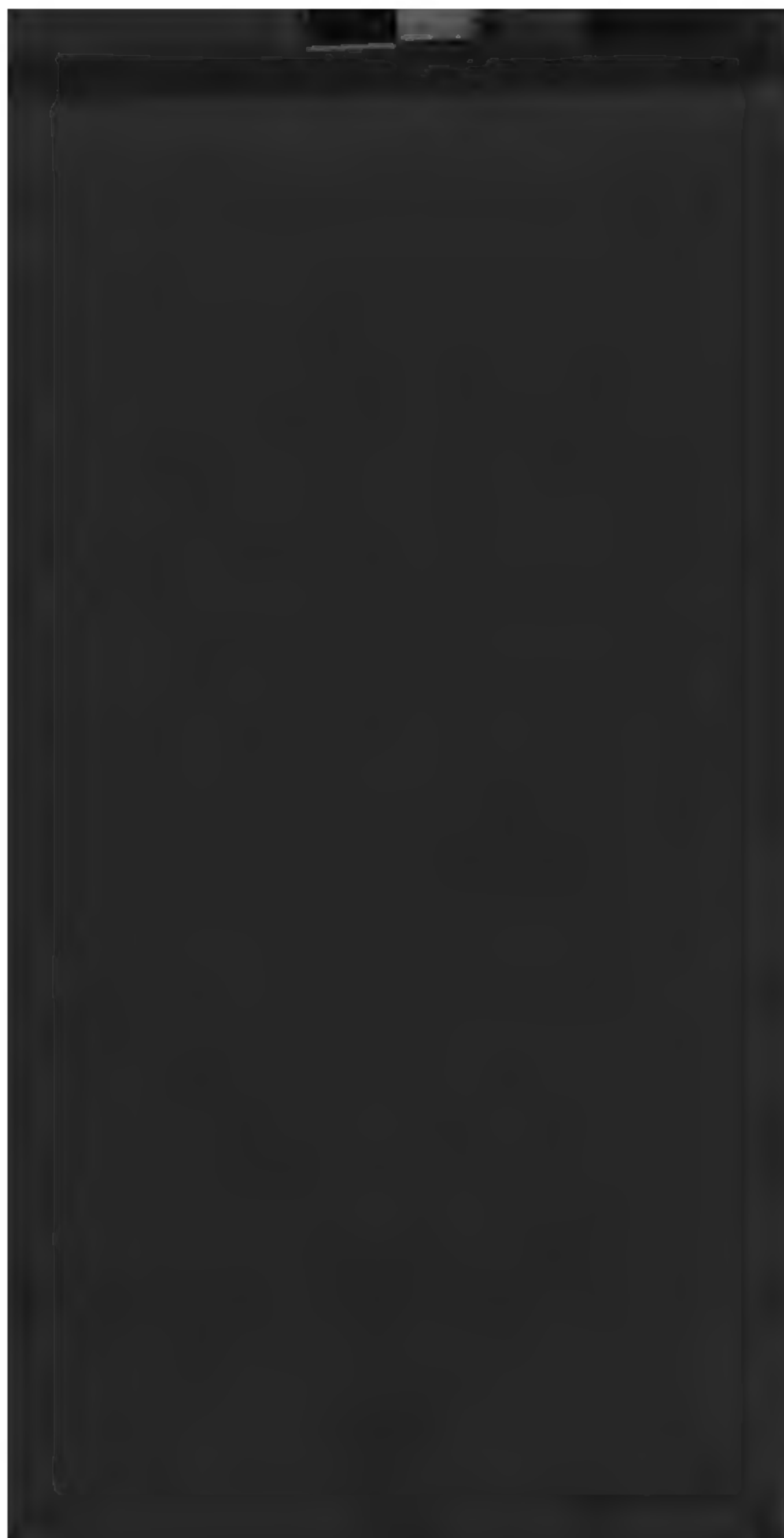
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Healing Leaves.

Healing Leaves.

SERMONS

BY

JOHN HENRY SMITH, M.A.,

VICAR OF MILVERTON, WARWICKSHIRE.

"The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Lev. xxi. 2.



London:

HATCHARD & Co., PICCADILLY.
1875.

LEAMINGTON :
PRINTED BY DAVID SARNEY, REGENT STREET.

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THE SON OF MAN.

MATT. xvi. 13.

“ Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am ? ”

THE SON OF MAN:—Such is one of the many appellations by which the Messiah was prophetically indicated, ages before our Lord's advent in the flesh. *I saw in the night visions, writes the prophet Daniel, and behold one like unto the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came unto the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given unto Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.* It is also that particular Dan. vii. 81. appellation by which He most loved to designate Himself during his public ministry among us. Often as He spoke of God as his father, it is but seldom that we find Him calling Himself *the Son of God*. Occasionally He does so; and at times too He calls Himself simply *The Son*: but *The Son of Man* is the designation He most loved. Accordingly it is frequently to be met with in the pages of the New

Testament; and though never applied to Him by others until after his ascension, when for the first time we find it employed by the martyr Stephen, who declared that he saw *the heavens opened, and the*
 Acts vii. 56. *Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*, it is of continual recurrence in our Lord's own mouth. Has it ever occurred to you to consider its import, or the reason why He should have selected this particular appellation, in preference to any other title under which He was predicted? The commentators upon Scripture give us but a very poor and inadequate account of its large significance, and a few suggestions upon the subject may perhaps, therefore be not unworthy of your attention.

Looked at, then, even in its lowest aspect, as an emphatic assertion of his real and proper humanity, it will immediately strike you as conveying an intimation of another, and a higher nature than the human. For what sane man, who was merely a man, would ever think of going about and declaring himself to be really a man? Neither prophet nor apostle, however gifted and distinguished, ever thought it necessary to do that. Their humanity was evident enough, and needed not that they should endeavour to impress others with the conviction of it. Christ's humanity was also evident enough; so palpable indeed, that when He spoke of God as his Father, the Jews took up stones to stone Him, for what shocked them as an intolerable impiety. Yet man

as He evidently was, He was not satisfied with being seen and known as a man ; but everywhere, and on all occasions, in private conversation, and in public discourse, to his friends and to his enemies, to all with whom He came in contact, He constantly spoke of Himself under an appellation, one evident design of which was to declare and enforce the plain, obvious, unquestionable fact, of his real and proper humanity ! Think of it for a moment, and then say, whether, had He been nothing more than man, it is possible that He should have acted thus.

Take then the statements of Scripture, that, though born of a woman, He had no human father ; that a virgin was his mother, and that He was conceived of the Holy Ghost : that He had stooped to the assumption of our nature ; that one with the Father from eternity, He had, by his own voluntary humiliation, taken upon Him the form of a servant, and been made in the likeness of men, and then, nothing will seem more natural and appropriate, than that he should thus assert and insist upon the fact of his humanity. For what a fact it is ! How great ! How wonderful ! How momentous ! How could it be otherwise than continually present to his own mind ! Or how, feeling its greatness as He must have felt it, could He have been otherwise than anxious, that those, for whom He had thus stooped, should feel its greatness to ? To the Jews who looked upon Him as a blasphemer, it might

indeed seem strange and offensive, that He should thus be always speaking of Himself in language so unnecessarily declarative of that which they saw with their own eyes, and which it was impossible for them to doubt. They, in their perplexity, might well enough demand. *Who is this Son of*
John xii. 84. *Man?* But to us, to whom the great truth has been revealed, that as He was really and perfectly human, so He was really and perfectly divine, God as really as He was man, nothing can be more signally consistent with the fact of his condescension, than that He should thus continually insist upon it, and identify Himself with man, by calling Himself *The Son of Man*, even as He identified Himself with God, by declaring Himself *The Son of God*.

It was also in perfect consistency with the motive and object of his humiliation. For it was all his own pure love for man that had brought Him down from heaven. Fallen as we were, his delights had ever been with the sons of men. It was to redeem and restore them, and to make them great, that He had become incarnate; and the love which led Him thus to humble Himself, and which spoke out in every action of his life, spoke out also in the appellation in which He spoke of Himself. It was the earnest, irrepressible utterance of the strength of that love, the depth of that compassion, which had led Him so to abase Himself: to become *bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh*.

The appellation, however, involves much more than this. It obviously contains an intimation of something extraordinary in his humanity; something singularly distinguishing Him from all the sons of men, at the same time that it identifies Him with them. For He does not style Himself *a* son of man, that is, a man, as all of us are men, but *THE Son of Man*—that is, *THE MAN*, emphatically, peculiarly, sublimely, as none others are or can be. *Whom do men say that I, THE MAN, am?* I, The Man—as if He stood by Himself, alone, in wonderful and conspicuous peculiarity; or as if He were the only real man in existence, and all others were men only in part, or in appearance. Strictly speaking, indeed, such was the fact. According to the divine idea of man, they were not men, real, genuine, God-made men; but creatures of a very different stamp. Man, as God originally created him in his own likeness, perished at the Fall, when that terrible inversion took place, by which the spiritual nature was sunk beneath the animal, and the divine image in us was destroyed. Our humanity is a degenerate and disordered thing, now that men are naturally *alienated from the life of God*, and governed, not by reason and conscience, but by sense and passion, and the instincts and appetites of our lower nature. Our humanity is humanity marred, and spoiled, and brutified by sin. But in Jesus Christ there was no sin. *He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from*

Ephes. iv. 18.
Heb. vii. 26.

*sinner*s. His humanity was without stain or flaw, pure and perfect as on the day when *God saw every-*
Gen. i. 31. *thing that He had made, and behold, it was very good.* In Him there were no rebellious insurgencies of appetite and passion, no disorderly conflict between the lower nature and the higher, no law in the members warring against the law of his mind; but the flesh was in absolute subjection to the spirit, and his whole mind and heart in entire and strictest harmony with the mind and heart of God. So that there He stood, the very beauty of holiness, the living human image of God; the perfect embodiment of the divine ideal of humanity; of all mankind the only genuine man; THE MAN, on whom all eyes and hearts were to rest and fasten.

The appellation also further imports our Lord's total exemption from all those constitutional and discriminating peculiarities, which are determined by the circumstances of race, or climate, place, or parentage. We speak, for instance, of the several varieties and races into which the great human family is divided: the Caucasian, the Mongolian, the Ethiopian varieties: the Saxon race, the Celtic race, and so on; and unquestionably they have each of them their own characteristic peculiarities, which, however they may have been originated, are perpetuated and transmitted from generation to generation with wonderful distinctness. The peculiarity of our Lord's humanity was that it was humanity exempted

from all these peculiarities, unaffected by any modifying influences of any kind. He was the impersonation of humanity in the abstract; *The Son of Man*: The Man, not of one nation, but of all nations; not of one race, but of all races; not of one age, but of all ages. True, He was *made of the seed of David according to the flesh*, but He was not thereby constituted a Jew. Rom. 1. 3. He was born also of a Hebrew mother in the city of David, and was brought up at Nazareth, in the midst of a Hebrew population; but neither had He any of the hereditary peculiarities of the Hebrew race, nor was his character moulded and fashioned by the manners, and customs, and modes of thinking, of his time. He had none of the Jewish sympathies or antipathies, predilections or prejudices; nothing of the exclusive nationality of the Jew about Him. He was subject to the Mosaic law, and observed the Mosaic ritual; but with all this, He was as much a Greek, a Roman, an Arab, or a Syrian, as He was a Jew. He ignored all distinctions of blood. He acknowledged no natural relationships or affinities but such as extended universally and equally to all mankind. It was not the Jewish nature that He had assumed, but *human* nature; human nature in its original simplicity; and He therefore called Himself, not the Son of Mary, nor the Son of David, nor the Son of Abraham, but *The Son of Man*; THE MAN, equally related to every age and to all peoples; equally the

brother of every individual of every race, tribe, caste and complexion, in every region, throughout all time.

And all this was necessary in order to qualify Him for the *office* He sustained, and the *work* which was given Him to do; an office and a work wide as the world, co-extensive with mankind; reaching back to Adam's fall, and onwards to the last of Adam's race; comprehending all in the universality of its scope. He was *officially* THE MAN; the Representative Man, the Substitutionary Man; the Representative of, and the Substitute for, our common humanity. He assumed our nature for two great purposes: that to man He might be the manifestation of God, and that to God He might be the representative of man. As *The Son of God*, therefore, He appeared among us, *the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person*. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shone upon us from the face of Jesus Christ; and he that saw Him, as He declared to Philip, saw the Father. As *The Son of Man*, He took our place under the Law, and stood representatively in our stead, that He might satisfy the Law in our behalf; that He might render it perfect obedience, and offer Himself up a public substitutionary victim to its offended majesty, redeeming us from its curse by being made a curse for us. He thus suffered for us, *the just for the unjust*; suffered for us, not merely beneficially, as a nursing

Heb. i. 3.
2 Cor. iv. 6.
John xiv. 9.

Gal. iii. 13.
1 Pet. ii. 18.


mother may suffer for her child, or a soldier in battle, for his country's good, but *substitutionarily* and *penally*, in our place and stead. His person was substituted for our persons, and his sufferings for our sufferings. *He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by his stripes we are healed. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* He, the sinless, consented to be Isaiah LIII. 5, 6. treated as a sinner, that we sinners might be treated as sinless. In this great, this public capacity, then, He, *The Man*, officially suffered and officially died. There on the cross He hung, spotlessly pure and perfect, agonizing under the imputation of the world's guilt, the sinless substitute for man's sinful race, the substitutionary man, the representative sinner! There He hung, a voluntary victim to the violated majesty of the Law, and in Him mankind representatively died. *For we thus judge, writes St. Paul, that, if one died for all, then all died.**

This, we say, was the character of his *death*; and this too was the character of his *life*, as the Son of Man. Upon this principle it was, that, upon his entrance upon his public career, He presented Himself for baptism to John. The baptism administered by John was the baptism of repentance. *I indeed,*

* Not *were all dead*, as in our version. The verb is in the second aorist, ἀπέθανον. 2 Cor. v. 14.

said he to the people, *baptize you with water unto*
Matt. III. 11. *repentance.* On the part of the people it was a strictly penitential act, a solemn confession of their guilt, and a solemn renunciation of sin, from the pollution of which they were symbolically cleansed. *They*
Matt. III. 6. *were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins.* But why then should Jesus be baptized? What propriety was there in *his* baptism? Or what object could be answered by it? Jesus was the Holy One of God, without blemish and without spot. He was made indeed in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, but in Him there was no sin. Personally, He had nothing to confess, nothing to repent of: and why then should He be baptized with the baptism of *repentance*? John himself felt this difficulty in all its force, and shrank from the thought of administering the symbol of purification to one, who, as the Messiah of God, must, he knew, be exempt from all taint of pollution. *He forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?* Our Lord's reply, too, *Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil*
Matt. III. 14. *all righteousness,* is persuasive, not explanatory, and leaves the enquiry unanswered. Precisely the same difficulty attaches to other passages of his life as well as to his baptism. Why, for instance, should He be circumcised? Why celebrate the passover, and keep the annual feasts at Jerusalem? All these were ordinances based upon the fact of human sinfulness,
2 Cor. v. 81. and the observation of them by Him *who knew no*

sin, might seem, therefore, unnecessary, if not, indeed, inconsistent. Various answers have been given to this enquiry, but none of them at all satisfactory. It is said, for example, that our Lord designed to do honour to the ministry of John, and that He submitted therefore to baptism, as a strong practical attestation to the reality of John's divine commission. But this is no explanation of the apparent inconsistency of his conduct. It is also said, that He designed to sanctify the rite of Baptism by his own example, and thus to commend it to all his followers : but this, besides that it involves the same inconsistency, quite overlooks the difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism—a difference so great and essential, that St. Paul commanded the disciples at Ephesus, who had been baptized only with John's baptism, to be baptized again in the name of the Lord Jesus. It is said Acts xix. 1-7. again, that, as John's baptism was an ordinance of divine appointment, it became Jesus to recognize it as such, and to show his readiness to comply with all God's requirements : but this is merely paraphrasing our Lord's own answer to John, without throwing any additional light upon it. Look at it then by the light which the appellation in the text sheds upon it. Look at Jesus in the character and office He sustained as *The Son of Man*. Look at what He was, and what He was to be, and to do ; discriminate between what was *personal* in Him and what



was *official*; and all these difficulties and apparent inconsistencies immediately brighten into indications and illustrations of the wonderful peculiarity of his function. It was not *personally* as a man, a private individual, that He presented Himself for baptism, but *officially* as THE MAN, the public, representative, substitutionary man, whom it thus became *to fulfil*

Matt. iii. 15. *all righteousness.* It was He the personally sinless, submitting as we have said, to be treated as a sinner, that we, the sinners, might be treated as if we were sinless. This is the clue to his conduct. Upon this ground it was that, when an infant, He was circumcised, and that when a man, He observed the ceremonial of the Law. And now that He was on the point of entering upon the public duties of his ministry, it was sublimely appropriate that the solemnity with which He was inaugurated into his ministerial office, should be strictly in keeping with its consummatory act. For the same reason, therefore, that He ultimately stood before Pilate, He now presented Himself to John. In precisely the same capacity in which He endured the Cross He now submitted to baptism. Sin of his own He had none to acknowledge, but *the sin of the world* was imputed to Him, and *that* was the burden of his confession; and therefore it was that John was enabled to point Him out, as *the Lamb of God, which taketh away*

John i. 29. *the sin of the world.* On the bank of the Jordan He stood, the substitutionary man, the representative

sinner, and there confessed the iniquity of us all. Immersed in its waters the world was representatively baptized in Him; and the voice that came from heaven declaring, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*—Oh! what was the meaning Matt. iii. 17. of that glorious proclamation, but that *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, but making Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him!* Yes, it was not only when 2 Cor. v. 19. He hung forsaken upon the accursed tree, that Christ bore our sins, but they were laid upon Him by imputation from the very first. Beneath the burden of them He stooped throughout the whole of his earthly course. All along He submitted, sinless as He was, to be treated as a sinner; and thus in his baptism with water we may discern his baptism with blood, and see Calvary reflected in the current of the Jordan.

As The Son of Man, then, the Representative man, He was both baptised and crucified, and mankind were representatively baptised and crucified in Him. As the Representative man, too, when He rose from the dead, mankind rose also, quickened together with Him, and restored to newness of life in the divine favour. And as by his *resurrection from the dead* He was *declared to be the Son of God with power*, with an Rom. i. 4. emphasis greater even than that which spake from heaven at his baptism, so, too, was man himself

emphatically declared to be the child of divine love; and God proclaimed Himself to us as our Father, and bade us with filial heart look up to Him as his children, and realize, and rejoice in, our adoption in Christ Jesus. In Him we are not servants but sons; and *because* we are sons God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father! When, too, He ascended up on high, and passed within the veil, it was not merely as *The Son of God*, ascending to the re-possession of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; it was still also as *The Son of Man*, the common Head and Representative of our race. And not only as our Advocate and Intercessor, but as our *Forerunner* did He enter there. In our name He took possession of *the heavenly places*. To us, even as

Gal. iv. 6. to Him, were *the everlasting doors* lifted up; and we, in heart and hope, are to look upon ourselves as ascended too, and seated with Him there in the glory to which He is exalted. *God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together,*

Heb. vi. 20. *and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* As *The Son of Man*, The Representative Man, his life was our life, his death our death, his resurrection our resurrection, his glorification our glorification.

This, then, and nothing less than this, is the import of the appellation; and thus it is that our

humanity is ennobled in *The Son of Man*, and that *as men* we are privileged in Him. Yes, merely as *men*, simple human creatures: for the condemnation under which man fell by the sin of the first Adam was cancelled by the blood of the second, and He, therefore, is *the Saviour of all men*, though *especially of those that believe*. It is as redeemed creatures, redeemed ^{1 Tim. iv. 10.} by his blood from the curse of the law, that we are born into this world; and it is in solemn declaration of this glorious fact that we are baptised in his name, and sacramentally dedicated to Him. Even as *men*, then, though still more emphatically as Christians, genuine believers in Him, we are—to use the strong language of the Apostle—*members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*; and to see and feel this, ^{Ephes. v. 30.} to enter into his feeling for us, to realize our union with Him, and to rejoice in the gracious assurance that His Father is our Father, and His God our God—it is to this that He calls us. To do this is to believe in Him, to receive Him, to love Him, to make our calling and election sure. To do this is to have Him dwelling in our hearts by faith, and to be *filled with all the fullness of God*. But to close ^{Ephes. iii. 19.} our eyes to the great truth; to think of Him coldly, or not to think of Him at all; to be heedless of what He was, and is, and has done, and is still doing for us—this is to repudiate Him as our representative, to reject his substitution, to exclude ourselves from the scope of His redeeming mercy, and from

the loving fatherhood of God. It is to discard our adoption, and to become outcasts, exiles, aliens, enemies. It is degradation, it is misery, it is perdition. It is to fall from the very gate of heaven, down into the abyss of hell. *Every branch in me that*

John xv. 2. *beareth not fruit, He taketh away.....If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are*

John xv. 6. *burned.* Oh! by the mystery of his holy incarnation; by his holy nativity and circumcision; by his baptism, fasting, and temptation; by his agony and bloody sweat; by his cross and passion; by his precious death and burial; by his glorious resurrection and ascension, *behold the Man!* Behold Him, the Prophet, Priest and King of all mankind! Behold Him, as Friend, Brother, Saviour, Lord, our Advocate with the Father, and the Propitiation for our sins, our hope, our life, our heaven, our all! Let your heart soften to his mercy! Let it yield to the invitations of his grace! Let it open to the touches of his love! Let Him be your Guardian and Guide! Let Him clothe you with his righteousness, and enrich you with his merits, and make you joyful in his salvation, that so you may be *counted worthy to*

Luke xxi. 36. *stand before the Son of Man, when He shall come in*

Matt xxv. 84. *His glory, and all the holy angels with Him!*

CHRIST GLORIFYING THE FATHER.

JOHN xvii. 4.

“I have glorified thee on the earth : I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

THIS language is in the highest degree striking : but in this respect it is in perfect keeping with the whole prayer in which it occurs : a prayer which could have been uttered by none but Him who spake as never man spake—the only-begotten and well-beloved of the Father. He, however, stood in a relation to the Father which none but Himself could sustain ; and the language, therefore, in which He addressed the Father, was such as none but Himself could use.

Look at it for a moment, and you will immediately be struck with the absolute self-confidence which breathes in it : *I have glorified thee on the earth : I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was !* Not only is there no sense or acknowledgement of anything like imperfection in the manner in which He had discharged his ministry ; not only does He

assert its entire faultlessness even in the sight of Infinite Purity ; but He makes this the very ground on which He rests both his requests for Himself, and his intercession for others. Whatever construction may be put upon the words, *Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was* ; however they may be twisted and tortured so as to be evacuated of their august and obvious meaning : nothing can get rid of the fact, that He does not pray to be glorified as a matter of favour, but claims it as a matter of right ; and of right, too, springing out of the fact that he had faultlessly discharged every duty resting upon Him, and had finished the work which had been given Him to do ! How this is to be reconciled with the idea of the mere humanity of Christ, I know not. To me it seems impossible. To me it seems that were there nothing else of the like character to be found in the whole narrative of his life, this should of itself be sufficient to raise our conception of his dignity to an immeasurable height, up indeed to the very throne of God.

Look at the language again. *I have glorified thee on the earth ; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.* Finished the work ! And as yet He had not entered on his passion, and the great thing, without which all He had hitherto done would have been of no avail, was yet to be done ! *The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to*

give his life a ransom for many. This was the great Matt. xx. 28. thing for which He had come into the world, and it was the most arduous thing of all. It involved an agony to which all that He had hitherto suffered was as nothing; a sorrow of soul which amazed and overwhelmed Him; a desolation of heart which extorted from Him the strangest and forlornest cries. Even under the mere anticipation of what He had to pass through, the trouble of his soul had more than once appeared, and had shaken Him with an irrepressible agitation: yet does He lift up his eyes to heaven and say, *I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do!* He confidently speaks of it as already accomplished, and alleges it as the ground of his own glorification. And well He might; for with Him to purpose was to do. He was of one mind, and who could turn Him? Ever since Adam by transgression fell, the world had been governed upon a system of mercy based entirely on the sacrifice of the Cross. In his own purpose and in the purpose of the Father, He was *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.* Rev. xiii. 8. Of all that was necessary to be done in preparation for that dread event, nothing remained undone; and steadfastly, with unalterable resolution, he was advancing to the great catastrophe. He and the Father were one: one in purpose and in will, even as they were one in nature and essence. Each was in the confidence of the other. His love in coming into the world was one with the Father's who had sent

Him ; and therefore, with his cross and passion still before Him, He could calmly and confidently lift up his eyes to heaven, and say, *I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.*

A few observations which may serve in some measure to develope and illustrate the significance of this language.

Both clauses of the text may be regarded as embodying the same thought. *I have glorified Thee on the earth* : that is, I have declared and manifested thy excellences and perfections on the earth. This is *the work which Thou gavest me to do*, and I have done it. How, then, was it that our Lord had done this ? What addition had He made to that knowledge of God, of which the Jewish Church was already in possession ? Ignorant of God, of course they were not. They had the light of nature by which, says St. Paul, *the invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* The heavens declared his glory, and the firmament shewed his handywork. Day unto day uttered speech, and night unto night shewed knowledge. And to interpret and enforce the utterances of the material creation, they had *the lively oracles*, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets, all of them the inspiration of the Almighty, and all contributing to set Him forth in far more luminous revelation.

Rom. i. 20.

Ps. xix. 1, 2.

Acts vii. 38.

How clearly, indeed, and how fully were they instructed by those *holy men of old* who *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, to reverence and celebrate the divine perfections! God they knew to be a spirit, the one infinite and eternal Spirit, filling heaven and earth with the majesty of his glory. Of his greatness, his power, his knowledge, his wisdom, his holiness, how loftily they were taught to think and sing! Of his patience, and long-suffering, his pardoning mercy, his condescending grace, how familiar and endearing was the language in which He encouraged them to speak! How generous were the invitations and offers of his goodness! What solicitude did they not breathe! What hope did they not inspire! What consolation did they not impart! How David's heart had rested on them! How, when oppressed with the sense of guilt, they had solaced and supported him! How, in happier moments, he had triumphed in them and rejoiced! True; all this was so: and yet the idea of the divine character conveyed by the Old Testament Scriptures, with all its kindness and clemency, was, upon the whole, dark and severe, like a clouded or a stormy sunrise. It was, indeed, strictly in keeping with the character of the Legal Dispensation, and had in it more of the awful than the benign, more of the terrible than the attractive. The saints of old could indeed say, *the Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger and of great*

mercy : the Lord is good to all ; his tender mercies are
Ps. cxlv. 8-9. *over all his works : O give thanks unto the Lord for He*
Ps. cxviii, 1. *is good ; for his mercy endureth for ever !* But they had not been taught to say *God is love*. They had not risen to that conception of Him ; and hence those imprecations of vengeance upon their enemies with which their very prayers and praises are so laden. The harmony also of his perfections, and the consistency of his character, were far from being a matter of distinct intelligent perception. That harmony might be believed in, but it was not discerned. From the scene where his justice was at work, his mercy seemed to retire ; and where his mercy was obviously in exercise, his justice seemed to be withdrawn. Evidently, then, to make this consistency apparent, would be in the most eminent sense to glorify God. To exhibit Him in the harmony of his perfections, to manifest Him in all the lustre of his grace and glory, all the majesty and might of holiness and love, would be to disperse the clouds from the face of the great luminary, and to commend Him in a new aspect to the mind and heart of man. And this was the work which was given Christ to do, and this was what He did. He revealed God to man in an entirely new and wonderful manner ; a manner so wonderful, that the difficulty was, and still is, to believe in the reality of the fact. For He not only discoursed about God in new language, wonderful from its plainness and

simplicity : He not only instructed us in the benign and all-comprehensive fatherhood of God : He not only made known to us the will of God concerning us, and the gracious purposes of his reconciling mercy, but *He shewed us the Father*. He went in and out among us, and wherever He went, He was the visible *image of the invisible God ; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person*. Col. i. 15. Heb. i. 3. *God was in Christ ;* really and literally in Him ; 2 Cor. v. 19. dwelling in the humanity of Jesus as really and literally as our spirits dwell in our bodies ; and thus *God was manifest in the flesh*, presented visibly to 1 Tim., iii. 16 men in the man Christ Jesus. Yes, brethren, do not let the seeming boldness of this language startle you, but let us get firm hold of the mighty fact, nor bate an iota of its grandeur. Really to see God with our eyes of flesh and blood, is, of course impossible : but is it not just as impossible for us to see one another ? What we do actually see, this outward form and structure, is only, so to speak, the corporeal image of the inner man : not the real human person, not the human essence or self, which is just as invisible as the divine. We see the kindling of the eye, the motion of the lips, the varying expression of the countenance ; but that which looks through the eye, and speaks through the voice, and lights up the features, we cannot see. In precisely the same sense, however, in which we are said to be visible to one another, was God made visible to us

in and by Jesus Christ: and this our Lord Himself asserted in language than which nothing can possibly be more distinct and emphatic. *If ye had known me*, he said to his disciples, *ye should have known my Father also; and henceforth ye know him, and have SEEN Him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you, and yet thou hast not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father:* John xiv. 7-10. *and how sayest thou then, SHEW us the Father? What higher, clearer, brighter manifestation of Him can you have or ask for, when in looking upon me you do actually see Him also, who is in me, and is just, therefore, as visible to you as I myself am?*

So on a former occasion, when reasoning and remonstrating with the unbelieving Jews, he expressed Himself in language equally remarkable. *“I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself which hath sent me hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you, for whom He hath sent, him ye believe not.”* John v. 36-38. How are we to connect the assertion, *the Father which hath sent me hath borne witness of me*, with that which immediately follows—*“Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape”?* Why, in saying, *Ye have neither heard his voice at any*

time, nor seen his shape, our Lord is not to be understood as asserting the spirituality and invisibility of God, but as anticipating and answering an objection which he saw rising in the mind of the Jews to the declaration He had just made, that the Father Himself which sent Him had borne witness of Him. “The Father Himself hath borne witness of thee?” “When, and where, and how? For we have neither “heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.” True, was our Lord’s anticipative answer, ye have not: and why is it that ye have not but because *whom He hath sent, Him ye believe not?* Your unbelief in me is both blindness and deafness to you. Therefore it is, that in me and in my sayings you see a merely human form, and hear a merely human voice: but if you had *his word abiding in you*, enlightening the eyes of your understanding, you would see that in me there is far more than the man Jesus; you would recognize in my words the voice of the Father Himself bearing witness of me; and in my visible presence, as here you look upon me, you would discern Him manifested in the flesh before you!—This surely is the obvious, natural, and only adequate interpretation of our Lord’s language; and thus regarded, it corresponds most exactly with his language to Philip, *Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, SHEW us the Father?*

In Jesus Christ, then, were visibly manifested to us the excellences and perfections of the Deity. *In*

Col. II. 9. *Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.* He shewed us the Father. His miracles were the energy of the Father's power; his instructions the utterances of the Father's wisdom; his purity was the Father's holiness; his benignity the Father's grace; his humility the Father's condescension; his patience the Father's long suffering; his generous heart and open hand the Father's deep and boundless love. And how unspeakably is the glory of the incomprehensible God declared and illustrated to us, by this wonderful manifestation of Himself to the trembling, shrinking, guilty soul of man! With what unutterable gratitude ought we to be moved towards Him, for thus coming forth from the dark and awful recesses of the unknown into the light of open day: laying aside all his terrible majesty, divesting Himself of all that to our weak and sinful nature is unsupportable, and humanizing and familiarizing Himself to our apprehensions in the life of Jesus; giving distinct intelligible shape to the vague and cloudy notions with which we must otherwise have been bewildered; clearing the obscure, reconciling the contradictory, and permitting us to identify his ineffable greatness with the mild and unalarming majesty, *the meekness and gentleness of Christ!* God, who commandest the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge

2 Cor. x. 1.

of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. And 2 Cor. iv. 6
 in the face of Jesus Christ there is nothing, surely,
 to dishearten or dismay. Upon Him we may look
 without alarm, when even mothers could bring their
 little children to Him to bless them. In Him, surely,
 there is everything to attract, to conciliate, to en-
 dear; everything to engage our affection, to win
 our confidence, to excite in us that spirit of love and
 praise by which we are ourselves to glorify Him.
Behold the Man! said Pilate to the infuriated multi-
 tude, when he set the Prince of sufferers before
 them. Behold the man, indeed: but with other
 eyes than Pilate's! Far more is to be beheld in Him
 than Pilate saw. *O Zion that bringest good tidings, get
 thee up into the high mountain! O Jerusalem that
 bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength!
 Lift it up, be not afraid! Say unto the cities of Judah,
 Behold your GOD!*

Isaiah xl. 9

This, however, was only one mode in which
 Christ was to glorify the Father; only one part of
 the work which was given Him to do. In all this,
 He had, as the Son of God, been the manifestation
 of God to man; but He stood also in another capa-
 city, and sustained another character. He was the
 Son of Man: the official, representative man; and
 as such He was to act and to suffer. Wonderful it
 is to think that, throughout the whole of his earthly
 career, He had combined in Himself these two great
 functions: that while conspicuously displaying the

glories of divine nature, He had been fulfilling also a thoroughly human part: passing through an arduous process of human duty, human trial, human sorrow, and exhibiting in his faultless obedience to the divine law, the absolute ideal of human virtue. Sinless, too, as He was, immaculately pure and holy, yet, as the representative of sinful humanity, He had all along submitted to be treated as a sinner. As such He had been circumcised, as such He had been baptized of John in Jordan; as such He had observed the Ceremonial Law, and punctually fulfilled all righteousness, moral and ritual; so that He could confidentially challenge the world, and say,

John viii. 46. *Which of you convinceth me of sin?* All this He had done, not in his private individual capacity as a man, but in his public official capacity as THE MAN, the representative Man; and eminently had he glorified the Father by his obedience to the Father's will. But this was not all; this was far from all. All this was merely preparatory to the last great scene of all, in which by suffering as a sinner, the representative and substitutionary sinner, He might magnify the Law and make it honourable. Yes: for the moral government of God must be vindicated: Law, not having been enforced, must be sustained: the righteousness of God in pardoning transgression must be declared; and for this purpose, therefore, He had assumed our nature, and had come into our world. It was the Father's will, and that will He

Is. xlii. 21.

came to do. Sacrifice, and offering, and burnt-offering, the blood of bulls and of goats—these things could never take away sin; never constitute a sufficient consideration for the pardon of sin. All these things were instituted merely as figures of Him, who, when the fulness of the time should come, was to appear and to become Himself the Sacrifice—the *Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.* John i. 29. *Wherefore, when, He cometh into the world He saith,Lo, I come, (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God?* And thus far in the Heb. x. 5-7. accomplishment of that will He had advanced: and on He was going, on to the very end; deliberately, resolutely, stedfastly on; Priest at once and Sacrifice, to die for our sins, according to the Scriptures; 1 Cor. xv. 3. to bear our sins in his own body on the tree; to 1 Pet. ii. 24. redeem us from the curse of the Law, by being made Gal. iii. 13. a curse for us. And herein, and most eminently, did He glorify the Father, by whom He was thus *set forth, to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; that He might declare the righteousness of God in the manner in which sin is forgiven, and that God might be unimpeachably and evidently just, while yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.* Rom. iii. 25-26.

And what a demonstration too of the immensity of the Father's love! A demonstration before which all other, the very brightest exhibitions of his goodness, pale and fade. To this, as we all know, it is that He Himself distinctly points us; not to the

riches of creation: not to the marvellous order of nature: to nothing in the height above or in the depth beneath: but to his love in the gift of his Son to us, and to the love of his Son in giving Himself

Ephes. v. 2. *for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love to us in that while we were yet sinners*

Rom. v. 7, 8. *Christ died for us. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his son to be the*

1 John iv. 10. *propitiation for our sins.* Man had fallen away from his Maker; fallen into sin, fallen under condemnation: but the heart of the great Father yearned over his rebellious and apostate child, and would not, could not give him up. For the indulgence and satisfaction of his own paternal love, He would send after and restore him. It was, if we may

1 Tim. i. 11. *venture to use such language, as if the blessed God could not Himself be happy, so long as He did nothing for the recovery of his fallen child; as if He, the High and Lofty One, could not rest even in*

Isaiah lvii. 15. *his high and holy place, should He suffer him to perish! To rescue us, therefore from our ruin, to reclaim us to Himself, to win back our affections, to reinstate us in his family, to be able again to look upon us with a smile, and to behold in our blessedness the glorious reflection of his own, He gave us this mighty demonstration of his love. He spared*

Rom. viii. 32. *not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all! Him,*

the only-begotten and well-beloved of the Father ; Him, in whom He was well-pleased ; even Him He spared not ! Even Him, in the greatness of his love to us, He *bruised and put to grief*, laying on Him the iniquity of us all, that by his stripes we might be healed. Herein, then, is love : love in full, clear, match- 1s. III. 5-6. less, infinite expression ; love that must have thrilled all heaven with wonder and awe ; for in not sparing Him, He spared not Himself ! In making *his* soul an offering for sin, He laid his own infinite heart upon the altar ! But thus it was that God was glorified in Christ. Thus it was, by his loving acquiescence in the Father's will, his obedience *unto death, even the death of the Cross*, that Christ Philip. II. 8. glorified Him on earth, and finished the work that was given Him to do.

One word in conclusion.

As Christ glorified the Father by visibly manifesting the character and excellences of the Father, so is the Christian to glorify Christ by manifesting the character and excellences of Christ. This is our work, and it has been given us to do by Him who *suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should* 1 Pet. II. 21. *follow his steps. Let, then, this mind be in you which* Philip. II. 5. *was also in Christ Jesus.* His love to the Father, his absolute devotion to the Father's will, his meekness and gentleness, his patience and long-suffering, his generous beneficence, his self-sacrificing love—it is by earnestly cultivating these holy tempers and dis-

Gal. ii. 20. positions, by being thus evidently *crucified with Christ,*
 Rom. vi. 11. thus *dead, indeed, unto sin, but alive unto God, that*
 we are to be *always bearing about in the body the*
dying of the Lord Jesus, and that the life also of Jesus
 2 Cor. iv. 10. *is to be made manifest in our mortal flesh.* As followers
 of Christ this is our life-work; our daily, hourly,
 constant duty; a duty comprehending all duties; a
 work which is to enter into every other work—every
 occupation, every pleasure, every pursuit, dignifying,
 purifying, sanctifying all, *that the name of the Lord*
Jesus may be glorified in us, and we in Him, according
 2 Thess. i. 12. *to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Alas, for those by whom this supreme duty is dis-
 paraged and neglected! Alas, for the luke-warm
 and half-hearted, by whom it is indolently or capri-
 ciously done! On them Christ's life and love have
 been lavished all in vain. But happy, thrice happy
 they, who, though conscious of innumerable faults
 and failings, can yet rejoice, like St. Paul, in *the*
testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly
sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of
 2 Cor. i. 12. *God, they have had their conversation in the world!*
 Oh, to be able at the last to say with him, *I have*
fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have
kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown
of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will
 2 Tim. iv. 7-8. *give me at that day!* What happiness has the world
 to offer comparable with the satisfaction and the joy
 of a hope so bright and triumphant! Cheaply

would it be purchased at any sacrifice ! For thus to have glorified Christ on earth, is to be glorified with Him in heaven ; glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.* Rom. iii. 21.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

LUKE xxiv. 50, 51.

“ And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.”

IN many respects Moses, the Mediator of the Old Covenant, was an illustrious type of Jesus, the Mediator of the new ; and this he was himself divinely authorized to declare in the prediction which he made to the children of Israel.—*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me : unto him ye shall harken.* Though, however, our Lord was thus affirmed to be a prophet like unto Moses, the resemblance was only partial, the points in which they may be contrasted being at least as remarkable as those in which they agree. Moses was a frail and imperfect man, compassed with infirmities : Jesus was the Holy One of God, without blemish and without spot. Moses was a temporal deliverer ; Jesus a spiritual Saviour. Moses established only a typical economy, which was confined to one people, and which was to wax old and pass away ; being

indeed merely preparatory to that which Jesus introduced; an economy embracing all nations, and extending throughout all time.

But the manner in which they respectively terminated their earthly labours, affords one of the most signal illustrations of the immeasurable superiority of *the Apostle and High Priest of our profession*. When Heb. iii. 1. the Hebrew Lawgiver was to be taken from the children of Israel, he assembled them on the plains of Moab to receive his parting charge; and having poured out upon them his prophetic benedictions, he went up to the top of Pisgah, thence to behold in distant prospect the land he was not privileged to enter. He went up, but it was alone; and what may have transpired on the summit of Pisgah, with what divine manifestations he may there have been favoured, we know not. He was alone on the mountain. Alone he surveyed the promised land, and there, in that retired solitude he died, and *no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day*. By invisi- Dent. xxxiv. 6. ble and superhuman hands he was buried in an unknown grave, lest his tomb or his relics should afterwards become the object of idolatrous devotion.

But in no such precautionary concealment was the departure of Jesus enveloped. When the hour was come that He should return to the Father, unlike the great lawgiver of Israel, He gathered his apostles about Him, and led them up into Mount Olivet, for the very purpose that they might be eye-witnesses

of his triumph, and bear public attestation to the world of the glorious fact of his ascension. Having therefore, assembled them in Jerusalem, *He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.* And there He liveth for ever and ever! Glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, there He sits enthroned *a Prince and a Saviour*, to attract our affection to Himself, and to be eternally the object of love and adoration, as well to angels as to men.

Acts v. 81.

St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, informs us that, between the resurrection of our Lord and his ascension, an interval of forty days elapsed; and that during this period, *He shewed Himself alive to the disciples by many infallible proofs*, and instructed them in *the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. He did not therefore hurry his departure. He shewed no impatience to be gone from a world where He had been so vilified and outraged. Preeminent as they were, He discovered no eagerness for the honours, to which He was to be exalted. For forty days He continued lingering among the scenes of his wonderful ministry and his strange humiliation, shewing us, that it was not in wrath or resentment that He had risen from the grave, but that his sympathies were with us still, and that over his love as over his life, death had no dominion. But as *He*

Acts i. 8.

came forth from the Father and came into the world, so must He leave the world, and go to the Father. He had John xvi. 28. glorified Him on the earth; He had finished the work which was given Him to do. As the manifestation of God, He had shewn us the Father; and as the Representative of Man, He had been *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*, offering Himself Philp. ii. 8. without spot to God, and making *reconciliation for* Heb. ix. 14. *the sins of the people.* His earthly ministry was con- Heb. ii. 17. cluded; His heavenly ministry was now to begin. It was only there, in *the Holiest of all*, that the Heb. ix. 8. functions of his intransmissible High-Priesthood could be discharged. After forty days, therefore, He ascended. . He *entered into that within the veil*, and Heb. vi. 19. *sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.* Heb. i. 3.

The life which Jesus lived during this interval is however involved in great obscurity. Where He took up his abode; where and how he spent the day and passed the night, we are nowhere informed, and probably no one knew. Certainly He never discovered Himself to any but his disciples, and to them only occasionally, though more frequently, perhaps, than the Evangelists have thought it necessary to record. He never shewed Himself publicly, as He had done before his crucifixion, either in Jerusalem or elsewhere; and in this He fulfilled his own words: *Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more.* And it was so. The world saw Him no John xiv. 19. more! Had He, indeed, shewn Himself to the

priests and elders at Jerusalem, they might only have been exasperated to fresh attempts against his life, even as they had *consulted that they might put Lazarus to death*: at all events, as they had rejected his personal ministry, so now it was for ever withdrawn from them. If they were to be convinced of his Messiahship at all, it must be by other means and other evidences than those which they had so wantonly despised.

Even to the disciples the manner of his appearance was, for the most part, very mysterious, and quite supernatural. When He addressed Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre, though knowing Him so well, she supposed Him to have been the gardener; nor was she able to recognize Him till He discovered Himself to her affections by the tone in which He said,

John xx. 16. *Mary!* So with the two disciples going to Emmaus: their senses were laid under some supernatural restraint: *their eyes were holden that they should not know Him*; and as soon as *their eyes were opened* so

Luke xxiv. 16. 31. *that they knew Him, He vanished out of their sight.* In a similarly mysterious manner He presented Himself at night to the assembled disciples in Jerusalem. The doors of the chamber were closed for fear of the Jews; but suddenly and noiselessly He *stood visibly in the midst of them*, so that *they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.*

Luke xxiv. 36. So at the lake of Tiberias, when He addressed them from the shore, and said, *Children, have you any meat?*

they had no suspicion that it was He; nor was it till He had repeated a miracle which He wrought at the commencement of his ministry, that the startling truth flashed upon the mind of the beloved disciple, who then exclaimed, *It is the Lord!*

John xxi. 5.

The life which Jesus now lived was no longer a mortal life. *Death had no more dominion over Him,* Rom. vi. 9. and life, therefore, had no need of being sustained in the same manner as before. *The Son of Man no longer came eating and drinking.* On one occasion, indeed, it is said that *He ate fish and honeycomb before them;* but this, not because food was necessary to Him, but only for the purpose of convincing them that it was Himself, in his own palpable identity, and not a phantom or a bodiless spirit, as in their consternation they had imagined. At the lake of Tiberias too, He presided over their simple repast, but it does not appear that He partook of it. He seems merely to have blessed and distributed the bread and fish among them. Though He was not yet glorified, some mysterious change would seem to have taken place in his corporeal structure, which, while in no degree affecting his visible identity, yet lifted him quite out of the portion of mortal humanity. Very wonderful this! Lazarus after being raised from the dead, lived the same life as before, and fell again beneath the power of death. But not so Jesus. Though still on earth, still truly and perfectly a man, He was no longer a mortal man.

Matt. xi. 19.

Luke xxiv. 43.

John xx. 15.

Though not yet glorified, this corruptible had nevertheless put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality.

All that we know of the life of Jesus during this interval of forty days, is, that He appeared occasionally in a very remarkable and mysterious manner to the disciples, in different places as well as at different times; but where He was in the meantime, and how He was engaged, is a subject wrapped in the darkest secrecy. There seems to have been an intentional mysteriousness about Him and all that He did; and his design in this seems to have been to keep alive that feeling of the great, the awful, the superhuman, the divine, with which they naturally, and most evidently, regarded Him after his resurrection. The old familiarity of their former intercourse was quite at an end.

One main object of his anxiety during this interval appears to have been, to establish irrefragably the grand fact of his resurrection. And for this purpose it is interesting to observe how He multiplies and varies the evidences of it, so as to render the testimony of the Apostles altogether unassailable:—appearing to them both separately and collectively; to some in one form, to others in another: now to

John xx. 14. Mary alone, at the sepulchre; then, to the two
Matt. xxviii. 9. Maries, on their way from the sepulchre: then, to
Luke xxiv. 15. the two fugitive disciples, on their way to Emmaus: then, to Peter; and the same evening, to ten of the

eleven apostles in Jerusalem. Then, lest any doubt Luke xxiv. 38, 39. should attach to the reality of these appearances, and to allow time for their agitation to subside, He suffers a whole week to elapse, before presenting Himself to them again, to satisfy the obstinate incredulity of Thomas. After this, He changes to a great distance John xi. 26. the local scene of these appearances, and meets the disciples in Galilee, on a mountain which He had Matt. xxviii. 16. appointed for the interview, and also at the lake of Tiberias. Then finally He meets them again in John xxi. 1. Jerusalem, whence He leads them out to Bethany to witness his ascension. In these varied and repeated appearances, after such intervals for thought and self-recollection, for the cooling down of all excitement and agitation, how manifest is his anxiety, that the testimony of the apostles to the all-important fact of his resurrection should rest upon an immovable basis, and be totally beyond all possibility of impeachment!

Another object which He had in view, was to instruct them in *things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*: especially the necessity which there was for his sufferings, and death, and resurrection, and the fidelity with which in these respects the Scriptures were fulfilled in Him. It is remarkable, Luke xxiv. 44. however, how little they seem to have understood his instructions, even those which He gave them respecting the comprehensiveness of their function as *witnesses unto Him, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea*;

and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Though nothing could be plainer than his

Acts i. 8.

declaration that He had suffered, and died, and risen again, in order *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations be-*

Luke xxiv. 47.

ginning at Jerusalem : though nothing could be larger and more emphatic than the command which He

Matt. xxvii. 19.

laid upon them, to *go and teach all nations, to go into*

Mark xvi. 15.

all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, yet certain it is, that they did not understand his language, and that it was not until full seven years after they had been endued with power from on high, by the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Ghost, that they had any, the slightest apprehension that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was abolished in The Son of Man, and that the Gospel they were commissioned to preach was a Gospel for all alike, a mighty scheme of mercy embracing all mankind.

The truth is, that the notion of a temporal kingdom—the idea that He was literally to reestablish the throne of David, and to reign as a monarch in Jerusalem, had got such absolute possession of their minds, as to render them impracticable to all his efforts to enlighten them. Their hopes of this, had, indeed, died away, when they beheld him expire on the cross; but they revived in all their force when He rose from the dead, and to the last we find them clinging to the fond idea, and impatiently inquiring

of Him, *Lord wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* But prejudices of this kind, carnal Acts i. 6. notions as to the nature of Christ's kingdom upon earth, are amongst the most formidable obstacles to the reception of the Gospel in its purity and comprehensiveness. And they operate even to the present day. Analogous to this prejudice which blinded the minds of the disciples, is the notion so common among us, of the visible oneness of the church: a notion which, when it does not actually drive men into popery,—as it often does—operates most lamentably to the preclusion of that unity of spirit, in which the true unity of the church consists. A prejudice of this sort is like a strong man armed, keeping the house, and barring and bolting every avenue through which the truth may gain entrance into the understanding and the heart. It was absolutely necessary, not only that Jesus should leave this world and return to the Father, but that the disciples should *see* Him depart, in order that they should be emancipated from the thralldom of this pernicious error. Our Lord knew this, and therefore, before their very eyes, He went up to his glory.

He led them out as far as Bethany. Though He would not ascend from Jerusalem itself, yet we cannot but remark how his heart seems still to have hung about it; how tenderly He still felt for it—the chosen city of the chosen people! Though He shewed Himself

no more openly, He still seems to have been attracted and drawn to it; and perhaps walked along its streets, invisibly to others, but sorrowfully marking all around Him, and contemplating that temple which was soon to be laid desolate, in the very spirit in which, from the Mount of Olives, He had

Luke xix. 41. *beheld the city and wept over it.* His last words were uttered almost within hearing of its busy murmurs: and not from Bethlehem where He was born, nor from Nazareth where He was brought up, nor from Galilee which was the principal scene of his ministry, but from the immediate neighbourhood of the guilty city He ascended, his last look, perhaps, as He went up to heaven, falling on its devoted towers.

Whether any others than the apostles were privileged with beholding this last and crowning act of his earthly career, we are not informed. There was his mother, and the Maries, and *the women who*

Matt. xxvii. 55. *followed Him from Galilee* with such constant and reverent affection, and who continued afterwards in

Acts i. 14. Jerusalem, closely associated with the apostles—one might suppose that they, whose devotion to Him had been so signally displayed, would scarcely be excluded from this last mark of his regard. His mother especially—how she would have been comforted by the spectacle of his glory! she, whose

Luke ii. 21. heart *the sword* had pierced, and who must have sorrowed over his sufferings with a love so tender, and a grief so deep! The silence of the Evange-

lists upon this point is very remarkable. We never read of his appearing to *her* after his resurrection. Of his appearances to others, we have particular accounts; but we are nowhere informed of the circumstances under which He shewed Himself to his mother. She is totally passed over, while others are distinctly mentioned; and not a word is dropped from which it might be inferred that, whatever He may have felt for her, He manifested towards her any higher regard than He did for the rest of his disciples. Brethren, the silence of Scripture on this subject is full of instruction, and speaks volumes against the hideous superstition, by which the mother of Jesus it so deeply dishonoured in being so idolatrously exalted.

He led them out as far as Bethany.—When Elijah 2 Kings ii. 2, 4, 6. was on his way to the scene of his assumption, he again and again besought Elisha to leave him. He knew that the Lord would take him up, and his soul was evidently oppressed, and even appalled by the grandeur of his privilege; which, indeed, while exempting him from the common doom of mortality, must, nevertheless, in its supernatural and utterly unimaginable circumstances, have seemed to him scarcely less formidable than the mystery of death itself. An awe was visibly upon him, darkening into sternness his habitual reserve, and rendering even the sympathetic anxieties of his friend and disciple, unwelcome, and intrusive. Absorbed in

his own incommunicable feelings, he longed to be alone ; that in loneliness and silence, undisturbed by any human presence, he might gather up his faith and courage, and brace his spirit for the great event. How different Jesus ! He was about to ascend, *up*
Ephes. iv. 10. *far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.* His regal glories were fast gathering about Him. Troops of angels were joyously mustering to escort his triumphal entry through *the everlasting doors* ; but his serenity was undisturbed ; his solicitude was not for Himself, but for those whom the Father had given
Psalm xxiv. 7. him. It was for them that He felt ; for their ignorance, their infirmity, their low and grovelling affections, their feeble, faltering faith. He was about fatally to disappoint their expectations of a temporal
John xvii. 2. monarchy, but He would not leave them *comfortless*. He would inspire them with other feelings, and with nobler hopes. He would lift up their affections from earth to heaven. He would raise their faith to an elevation from which it should never droop ; He would give it an impulse that should never die. He was ascending unto the Father, and in sympathetic exultation they should ascend with Him, and rejoice with Him with a joy which no man should take
John xvi. 27. from them. Calmly, therefore, He assembled them, and led them forth : calmly He discoursed with them, and laid upon them his last commands ; and then, when arrived at the spot where He was to plant his last footsteps on earth, *He lifted up his*

hands and blessed them: blessed them as none but Himself could bless them—with such an emphasis of love, such absoluteness of authority, such efficacy of benediction. He could command a blessing, and that blessing He did command, as one to whom all power was given in heaven and in earth. Were they not struck by the depth of his feeling, the solemnity and pathos of his voice and manner? Did they not look up to Him with reverence and surprise as the words of blessing fell in blessings on them? But oh, the ecstasy of astonishment into which they must have been transported, when, as they looked, and while He was yet speaking, with arms extended over them, as if shedding upon them the blessings He pronounced, they saw Him *parted from them*: beheld Him upborne by some invisible power, and soaring slowly away from out their very midst; ascending and still ascending in his wingless flight, till at length his gracious form was lost in the bright cloud of ministering angels, “innumerable hosts of light,” that hovered there waiting to receive Him! Wonderful spectacle! In its calmness and majestic composure, beyond comparison more affecting than the fiery rapture of the prophet! Wonderful spectacle! But how else should his earthly career have closed? The heart would have been dissatisfied with any catastrophe less sublimely triumphant, as utterly unworthy of Him who had *abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light*: 2 Tim. i. 10.

John i. 14. Him, *the only begotten of the Father*, the visible manifestation of God to man. Wonderful spectacle! Fit consummation of a career in which the extremes of glory and of shame had so met and mingled! No marvel that the disciples worshipped Him, when

1 Cor. xv. 47. they beheld Him, *the Lord from heaven*, thus returning to the heaven from which He came. No marvel that, having been with Him in his temptations, and been witnesses of his sufferings, they should now exult in his triumph, and return to Jerusalem with great joy. Though gone He was not lost. A cloud had received Him out of their sight, but into heaven they had seen Him go. He *is gone into heaven*, writes one of them, *and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto Him*.

1 Peter iii. 22. It is in heaven that we must seek Him, *at the right hand of God*. Where, indeed, that is, we can form no conception, any more than we can of the gratulations with which He was welcomed there, or the glory and honour with which He is crowned. We must die, and ourselves become glorified immortals, before we can form any idea of the heaven which has received Him, or of the dignity of his position *at the right hand of God*.

He is gone into heaven!—And how near to us that heaven be, or how remote, we know not. But to the dying martyr's opened eye He seemed not far off; and the persecutor in the way to Damascus, was struck blind and prostrate by the close vision

of his glory. Somewhere however, in the surrounding immensity, somewhere He must be. While in his divine essence unconditioned and incomprehensible, in his human nature, the body of his glorified humanity, He cannot but be subject to the limitations of place; and some particular scene there therefore must be, some sacred and palatial region in the immeasurable azure, some *high and holy place* Is. lvi. 15. among *the heavenly places*, into which He passed, and Ephes. ii. 6. where, as in his Father's house, He is now actually living and reigning. And, surely, it lends a new and matchless charm to the wondrous spectacle which the heavens present, to think that though we see Him not, yet that there He somewhere is—*the man Christ Jesus*, our representative and *forerunner* 1 Tim. ii. 5. within the veil; and that He is there, not in the Heb. vi. 20. enjoyment of an idle dignity, but that, *Head over all things to the church*, He is ruling over this world Ephes. i. 22. and over all worlds, gradually subjugating all things to Himself. *He is gone into heaven!* He is *exalted far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:* but exalted as Ephes. i. 21. He is, He is not exalted beyond our reach. Whatever his local or corporeal remoteness, in spirit, in affection, in sympathy, *He is not far from every one of us.* Acts xvii. 27. Not a sigh but He hears it. Not a care but He knows it. Not a grief but He pities it. Not a prayer but He receives it. He has an eye upon each of us, and a

heart for all—the same generous, loving, all compassionating heart which He had for us in the days of his humiliation upon earth. All his accumulated honours, all his accessions of glory upon glory, have not cooled his affections or altered his mind. He is *the Man Christ Jesus*, still: touched with the feeling of our infirmities still: not ashamed to call us brethren still: the same in heaven that He was upon earth—

Heb. xiii. 8. *the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever: the widow's Benefactor, the mourner's Comforter, the sinner's Friend! As He died for us, so He is living for us: preparing for us a mansion in his Father's house, that where He is, there we may be also.*

Rejoice, then, in the Lord! Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice!—For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,
Rom. v. 10. *much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

OUR FATHER'S HOUSE.

JOHN xiv. 2.

“In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

TO the charm of this language we cannot suppose any one insensible; but touching as in itself it is, it becomes still more so when regarded in connection with the circumstances under which it was spoken, and the trouble with which our Lord Himself was so evidently labouring, even while administering this gracious antidote to trouble. Heavy, indeed, was the pressure upon his heart. The treachery of Judas, and his dreadful end; the perfidy of Peter, and the frailty and faithlessness of all his disciples, whom He beheld in spirit, *scattered every man to his own*, like sheep without a shepherd John xvi. 32.—these things were all present to his mind, affecting Him with a distress, the depth of which was to be measured only by the love wherewith He loved them. *The hour* also was at hand, the hour for which He had come into the world—*his* hour, with all its sore amazement, all its unutterable weight of woe. Yet oppressed and straitened as He was, no

sooner does He perceive the trouble into which his disciples were thrown by the announcement of his approaching departure, than He seems at once to forget his own sorrows in his generous concern for their distress. *Let not your heart be troubled*, He said. Notwithstanding the trouble you perceive in me, and the yet deeper trouble in which you will soon see me involved, let not *your* heart be troubled ! Let nothing, however seemingly adverse and disastrous, shake your confidence in me, in my love, my fidelity, my power. *Ye believe in God, believe also in me.* I am leaving you, it is true, but it is on your account that I am going, and it is only for a time. *In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* Oh ! well has Christianity been called the Religion of Sorrow, even as Christ Himself, the *Man of Sorrows*, is divinely called *the Consolation of Israel*. To words so rich in comfort, who that has known anything of grief and fear can listen and remain unmoved ? Some, doubtless, will be affected by the language more deeply than others ; but probably no one, however hard and dry and cold his opinions, was able to listen to it without some emotion, some responsive stirring of the heart, the involuntary, intuitive recognition of the voice divine. To these gracious utterances let us

Is. lxi. 5.

Luke ii. 25.

then devoutly harken, and endeavour to meditate a little on the delightful manner in which our Lord has deigned to meet that intense and inextinguishable desire of happiness which is inherent in us all, and which trouble only kindles to a fiercer appetite. Let us fix our thoughts upon the heavenly rest, the last and crowning consolation of the Gospel, as He has imaged it to us in the text; and may *an unction of the Holy One* be upon us, enabling us to feel its ^{1 John, ii. 20.} beauty, and to appropriate its comfort.

Of one thing we may be certain, and that is, that no one could be so well qualified to speak of heaven, as He who Himself came down from heaven, and who, even while upon earth, was also in heaven. ^{John iii. 18.} Others could speak of it only as they were inspired; and glorious things they have spoken of it, as a Paradise of unfading delights, a city all built of jewellery and gold, a kingdom of which the subjects were all royal. St. Paul, indeed, overpowered by the recollection of his rapture, was unable to give any account of his marvellous experience, except that he had seen and heard unspeakable things, and words which it was *not possible for a man to utter.* ^{2 Cor. xii. 4.} What great and wonderful things our Lord might have said of it—He who knew it so well—had it pleased Him to enter into detail; how He might have fired our imagination by a description of its glories, we cannot conjecture; but it is to the heart rather than to the imagination that He chose to

address Himself, and the particular aspect in which He presented it to his disciples is as homely and interesting, as the language which He uses is simple and familiar. He calls it—His Father's house. *In my Father's house are many mansions.*

But His Father is our Father, and *He is not*
 Heb. ii. 11. *ashamed to call us brethren. Go, said He, to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and*
 John xx. 17. *your Father, and to my God and your God.* Heaven, then, with all its plenitude of glory and blessedness, our Lord would simplify and endear to our apprehensions by teaching us to contemplate it as our Father's house. And this was in beautiful consistency with his general manner; for He loved to assert the paternal character of God, and to teach his disciples to look up to God as their Father—their heavenly Father; but the kinder, and wiser, and better for that. *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things unto them that*
 Matt. vii. 11. *ask Him.* This, we know, was his constant habit. To the grand and mysterious in the Deity He seldom refers; for He came to reconcile man to God, to remove the terror from our hearts, and to encourage our approaches to God; and He loved, therefore, to dwell rather upon the attractive and the endearing in the divine character than upon the sublime and awful, and to illustrate Him to our apprehensions by ideas derived from the sweetest

affections of our nature, and the tenderest relationships of life. In speaking, then, of heaven as his Father's house, our Lord seems to have designed to touch some of the finest chords of human feeling. He designed us to think of heaven as our home, and to associate with it that same dear domestic charm which the child regards its father's house on earth.

Think then of your father's house ! Go back in thought to the period of childhood, and revisit in imagination the old familiar abode. It easily comes back upon the memory. It requires no effort, no conjuration to restore it to the view. There is a magic in the very words, which must have already called up in many of you visions and feelings to which no language can give utterance. Even now, as you gaze upon it in your mind's eye, your heart hangs about its walls ; and as voices long silent speak to you again, in the same kind tones that made your childhood glad, you sigh over the remembrance—the bitterer because so sweet—of a happiness irrecoverably gone. Your father's house ! Yes, you remember it well. You remember how—when forced to leave it—how loth you were to go, and how delighted to return : how you loved the very road that led to it, the very gates that opened to welcome you within them ! Where else did you ever feel so much at ease and so secure ? Where else have you ever been tended with such eager solicitude, and known such freedom from constraint and care ?

Where were your wants ever so anticipated, and your heart so indulged and satisfied as there? Years may have fled since you left your father's house, and you may have lived in statelier abodes; but, however humble the tenement, we doubt whether you have lived in any, to which you can now look back with livelier satisfaction, or with tenderer regret. How the thought of his father's house came back upon the poor prodigal's soul! How irresistibly it urged him home again! The comfort that was there! The plenty that was there! The contentment that was there! Oh! might he be but as a hired servant in his father's house, he would ask no more.

Even so, with somewhat similar yearnings, our Lord would have us look upon that *house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. It is our Father's house, our home—furnished with all a Father's heart could suggest for the comfort and gratification of his children; everywhere filled with his presence, and warmed with the sunlight of his smile: our home—the heart's sure refuge, its calm retreat, its quiet resting-place from care and toil, and the fever and confusions of the world: the natural centre to which all its best affections tend, and round which they play. Love, and joy, and peace are there, and all the virtues: and the *Friend that sticketh closer than a brother*; and those shining ones that rejoice over the repentant; and the loved ones that have

2 Cor. v. 1.

Prov. xviii. 24.

gone before us—the sainted society of the just made perfect, who will welcome us among them with a sympathetic delight, of which the kind household affections of earth are a sweet but feeble foretaste.

We may presume, however, that our Lord, in employing this language, had a yet further intention; that He designed to awaken feelings of a higher and more sacred order; feelings of a strictly devotional character, and specifically connected with the public solemnities of religious worship. The temple at Jerusalem He called his Father's house—*Make not my Father's house a house of merchandize*—John ii. 16. and in saying that in his Father's house there are *many mansions*, He is supposed to have alluded to the numerous apartments in the temple edifice, appropriated for the use and habitation of the priests, and the various orders of Levites. That temple has indeed, long been destroyed, but not the house of God. This still survives and will survive, so long as He shall inhabit the praises of Israel. An upper Ps. xxii. 3. room, the river side, the open plain—there needs no building made with hands—wherever there are humble and faithful hearts to worship Him, there He has a house, and an altar there. To the sacred fervours, therefore, of the sanctuary; to the feelings which the public solemnities of religion are adapted to inspire in all his spiritual worshippers, our Lord also referred, and these he intended us to associate with the thought of heaven as his Father's house.

It is a scene of perfect worship and of perfect praise. Then, in the noblest strains, and with unwearied powers, they serve God continually day and night before his throne ! In heaven there is, indeed, *no temple*, for heaven is itself all temple. *The Lord God*

Rev. xx. 22. *Almighty and the Lamb, they are the temple of it.*

These two things, then, the paternal roof, and the consecrated structure; the endearments of home, and the solemnities of the sanctuary, are to be combined and blended in our conceptions of the heavenly state. And surely, the combination is surpassingly beautiful. How is the mysterious familiarized, and the familiar sublimed, in the thought of heaven as at once a temple and a home !

And yet it is to be feared, that upon some minds the combination of the two ideas will only have the effect of weakening the charm. As a scene, indeed, where the social and domestic affections may be securely and uninterruptedly indulged, the thought of heaven cannot but be delightful to all ; but as the scene where the religious affections, heightened to seraphic ardour, will ceaselessly expatiate in worship and praise, it will be attractive to those only who can feelingly enter into the Psalmist's sentiment—*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! Blessed are they that dwell in thy house ;*

Ps. lxxxiv. 1-4. *they will be still praising thee !* Alas, that it should be so ! that there should be any for whom the House of the Lord has so little charm ! But if we are to

form our idea of heaven from our Lord's own representation of it, and if he presents it to us as our Father's house, we must be really and spiritually his children, in order that we may confidently look forward to heaven as our home; and we must have our eyes opened to see his *power and his glory in the sanctuary*, before ever we can anticipate its sacred Ps. lxxiii. 2. employments with delight.

But think:—What homes on earth are the happiest and most heavenly? Where is it that parental kindness and filial affection meet and blend in fairest union? Where is it that the household virtues, and the charities of domestic life, have their freest, finest, loveliest exercise? Is it in those dwellings where religion has no place? where the hearth is without an altar? where no morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise diffuse their wholesome incense? where God is unacknowledged and his blessing is unsought? Is it in such abodes that we may most surely look for love, and peace, and joy, and what of heaven that can be tasted upon earth? Or is it not rather in those homes where we see “pure religion breathing household laws:” where the fear and love of God preside; where his presence is recognised, his authority revered, his worship celebrated; where the parents, mindful of their Father which is in heaven, strive to *walk within their house with a perfect heart*, and to bring up Ps. ci. 2. their children as sons and daughters of the Lord

Almighty? *He is the God that maketh men to be of one mind in a house :** His blessing it is that maketh
PROV. x. 22. *rich and addeth no sorrow :* and it is in those homes where his name is honoured and his presence felt, that domestic piety cements domestic peace ; and hallowing the mutual affection, consecrating the common pleasure, and sweetening every duty with its own peculiar blessedness, makes the humblest dwelling a little domestic temple, a touching image of our Father's house above.

Consider too, the adaptation of this view of the heavenly state, this union of the domestic and the religious in our Father's house, to our nature and constitution as human beings.

We are formed for society, and thus we have our social instincts and affections ; and we are formed also for God, and thus we have our religious nature and capacities ; and both of these must be cultivated and developed, in order that we may enjoy the happiness of which He has made us capable. We must know the happiness arising from the social affections, and we must know too the happiness arising from the religious affections, or we know not half the happiness which we are constituted to enjoy. Where, then, are we to look for the happy man ? Are we to go to the ascetic in his cell, living a life of lonely devotion, and rigidly mortifying

his social propensities, that he may hold abstracted and entrancing communion with the infinite and invisible?—Why, what a one-sided, mistaken view of human nature this is! As if devotion were not heightened by sympathy! As if feeling did not circulate, and heart did not act and react upon heart, and the religious cultivation of our social nature here, were not a part of our preparation for the blessed society of heaven; or as if in heaven there were no society, but it were all an awful solitude, and a man, when he got to heaven, were to bend, a lonely worshipper, before the throne of God!—Manifestly, such a man, whatever his devotional enjoyments may be, knows not half the happiness of which his nature is capable. Not only has he no home, no scope for the exercise of his social affections, but he is deprived also of the pleasures of religious sympathy: he knows nothing of the happiness of his *Father's house* below; nothing of the manner in which the sensible fellowship of heart with heart, can impart ardency to prayer and animation to praise.—On the other hand, are we to look for the happy man in him who lives exclusively for society; indulging his social instincts to the mortification of his religious nature—for *mortification it is*. He has his religious sensibilities and his spiritual yearnings, of which, he cannot rid himself even if he would: and till he meets with an object adapted to satisfy them, he must necessarily be restless, dissatisfied,

unhappy ; the subject of a perpetual craving which nothing but God can appease. For it is God alone that can fill the soul : and till His Spirit comes down into the heart, and religion enters into the life, infusing itself into all his enjoyments and pursuits, he may be what the world would call a happy man, but he knows comparatively little of the happiness for which he was designed : he knows nothing of happiness in its highest form, *fellowship with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ* : he knows nothing of the charm which piety imparts to social life and to domestic intercourse : he is a stranger to his Father's earthly house with all its joys and endearments, and all his pleasures must be disastrously incomplete until he cultivates the whole of his nature, and is brought consciously into sympathy with *the household of faith*.

1 John, i. 3.
Gal. vi. 10.

He manifestly is the happy man in whom the religious capacity and the social capacity are developed together ; each lending its own grace and loveliness to the other, each imparting to the other its own element of happiness. Then the man lives ; the whole man lives. His heart is no longer one half mortified and dead. Not only are both the great principles of his nature exercised upon their appropriate objects, but each takes the character of the other. His domestic feelings become religious : his religious feelings become domestic : his home is a sanctuary, and the sanctuary a home.

Look, again, at this view of the subject in relation to your own actual experience. When is it that you have felt your home most happy, but at those times when you have brought away with you from the sanctuary the hallowed sentiments it inspired ; when you entered really and deeply into the devotions there ; when the word of God came to you with more than wonted power, and you gained some new impressions of his majesty or his mercy ; some livelier apprehension of the love of Christ ; and felt the life of faith strengthened within you by the services in which you had been joining ? You carried home this feeling with you, and you know how it suffused everything with its own lustre. You beheld every object by its light, and you felt your heart warming and opening to all around you with a love which it was happiness indeed to feel. You came away perfumed with the incense of the sanctuary, and it made your home fragrant.

And when is it that you have felt the highest happiness in the public solemnities of divine worship, but when you have come into the house of God as your Father's house, with a filial spirit and a child-like heart, and have been enabled to recognize Him more distinctly as Father, and to realize the sentiment of Christian brotherhood. Then it was that prayer and praise were the genuine utterance of the heart ; and that rejoicing in the consciousness that you were *no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-*

Ephes. ii. 19. *citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*, you rejoiced also in the thought of his common paternity, and more feelingly addressed Him, *of whom the whole*
Ephes. iii. 15. *family in heaven and earth is named, as our Father which art in heaven.* Yes, surely; it is when the sentiment of home is realized in the sanctuary; when the church is felt as a family, and the family feeling embraces the church, that the pleasures of our Father's house are known, and that we are meetest for the enjoyment of our heavenly home. Those who know this feeling best, will best know the meaning of our Saviour's language.

These considerations, if they serve in any measure to illustrate the idea in the text, will assist us also in our conception of the superior blessedness of the heavenly state.

Recur once more to the feelings of domestic life. Imagine the child, all duty and affection, looking lovingly up into its father's face, and reflecting the light of his complacent smile; reposing absolute confidence in his wisdom, and resting its heart upon his goodness and love. Some of us may know in some measure what this is; and even though we may have forgotten what we felt at that tender age, we may conjecture what the child feels, from the emotion with which we reciprocate its fondness. These pleasures are mercifully left us here below, and they are the honey on the thorns of life. Raise then this feeling up to God. Imagine Him the

Father, and yourself the child, full of the filial spirit, full of faith, and love, and duty; trusting implicitly in his goodness and wisdom, recognizing in everything around you the expressions of his kindness, and feeling—yes *feeling* the light of his countenance settling upon your soul. Imagine this—and we are asking you to imagine no impossible thing: it is what, without any enthusiasm, in the deepest composure of spirit, thousands have felt, and thousands more will feel: it is the very feeling which our Lord was so anxious to encourage in his disciples, and which the Gospel is designed to inspire within us all—imagine this, and you will instantly see that, in such a condition of mind and heart, there is a happiness surpassing all description, a rapturous repose of spirit with which no worldly pleasures can compare. But here *we see through a glass darkly.* ^{1 Cor. xiii. 12.} Here we have to realize the invisible. *We walk by faith, not by sight.* What then must the felicity of ^{2 Cor. v. 7.} heaven be, what the blessedness of that state where faith is swallowed up in vision; where you will be welcomed as a son into the immediate presence of your Almighty Father, and with capacities expanded to the fulness of the joy, will receive into your bosom all the fulness of his love!

Take then the other idea. Imagine yourself enjoying in the house of God all the happiness which the public solemnities of religion are intended to afford—excited by the sympathy of numbers to a

glow of holy devotion, absorbed in prayer, rapt in praise, hearkening to God's word as if He were Himself audibly addressing to you his promises, and commending to you his love: or at the table of the Lord, with opened heart receiving the tokens of his redeeming mercy, and vividly realizing his presence there. It was profanation to suggest in comparison with these any pleasures that the world can offer. Could you but feel all this in all its intensity, you would exclaim with the Psalmist, *I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!* Transfer it then to heaven. In heaven you will feel all this, and ten thousand times more. Think of its deep devotions, its exalted praise, its resounding symphonies, its everlasting strains, its glowing hearts, its rapturous tongues, its love, its ardours, its rejoicings, its sweet sympathy of soul with soul, and the communion of all with God—and what, oh! what must be the worship of the skies?

Ps. xlii. 6.

Take then, the two ideas together, and sublime them to the utmost conceivable perfection: the filial love and the profound devotion: the affections of home and the emotions of the sanctuary: the endearments of the father and the splendours of God! But thought, imagination, feeling—all are lost in the glories and the blessedness of our Father's house above. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him!*

1 Cor. ii. 9.

Oh, for the heart of a little child towards our heavenly Father! a heart to love, and trust, and serve Him without stint, and thus to realize the blessedness of our adoption in Christ Jesus; to live in fellowship with Him now, and to be thus meetening *for the inheritance of the saints in light!* Everything is comprehended in this; everything conceivable and inconceivable, for time and for eternity; everything to comfort, to satisfy, to ennoble, to exalt; everything that the soul can possibly desire and delight in—everything is included in this sublime relation. *Behold*, writes the Apostle; quite overpowered with the grandeur of the conception, and having no language in which to give adequate utterance to his feelings.—*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!*—*Beloved now are we the sons of God!*—Are we so indeed, Brethren? Is John iii. 1, 2. Is this really our character? Can we truly and rightfully appropriate the illustrious distinction? To how many of us might He not say, *If I be a Father, where is mine honour?* If indeed we are his children, Mal. i. 6. where is our love? where our obedience?

O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee, such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain thy promises which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

THE FAMILY OF CHRIST.

MATT. xii. 46—50.

“ While He yet talked to the people, behold his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Then said one unto Him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is my Mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Luke ii. 52.

ONE of the most remarkable things in the Gospel narratives is the silence they observe upon the subject of our Saviour's early life. Few things can be imagined more interesting or instructive, than a record that would enable us to trace the gradual developement of his mind and the progress of his character, as, *increasing in wisdom and stature*, He increased also *in favour with God and man*. But all this is hidden from us. The whole interval, between the settlement of his family at Nazareth after their return from Egypt, and his baptism by John, is wrapt in deep obscurity. The only thing recorded

of Him in this long interval, is the incident, related by St. Luke, of his visit to Jerusalem with Joseph and his mother, when He was about twelve years of age, and his lingering behind them there, until, after a three day's anxious search, they at last found Him in a place and in company where they least of all expected to meet with Him—among the doctors in the temple, the professors of theology, the gravest and most learned men of their time, who were then as much charmed with his modesty and intelligence, as in after years they were offended by his august and irresistible wisdom. This, and the bare additional statement that He returned with his parents to Nazareth, and lived with them as a son in dutiful subjection to their authority, is all the information we possess of the first thirty years of his life.

Doubtless, there are wise and sufficient reasons for the ignorance in which we are thus kept: and yet who, when he thinks of it, but must feel a solemn and lively curiosity to know more of the early history of Him, who was *fairer than the children of men*. Ps. xlv. 2. Assuredly, if, when He was but twelve years of age, there was this outbreak of intelligence and singularity, there must have been very much in his subsequent years, just as well worthy of being recorded. Whatever the retirement in which He might live, he could not rise to manhood, and thirty years pass over Him, without abundant materials for a biography, beyond all estimate more valuable

and instructive than any but that which the evangelists have sketched of Him in his public ministry. In the daily course of his domestic life, there would be numberless occurrences exhibiting his character in the loveliest aspects, and furnishing lessons of wisdom and examples of duty, by which all of every age might profit. In the filial relation, especially, we should love to know something of his conduct and demeanour; how, faultless Himself, He bore with the faults of others, and submitted to the frailties and infirmities of those to whom his obedience was due. Before He entered upon his public life, He must have followed his supposed father to the grave :—Who but would love to know how He repaid the guardian of his childhood for all his parental care; how He tended him in his sickness; how He smoothed his dying pillow; how He mourned over his breathless remains! And his bereaved mother—how lovingly He sympathised with her in her grief; how He dried her tears, and solaced her in the desolation of her widowhood. Who but would love to know these things—how He spake to her and comforted her then?

All these things are, however, left to our conjecture. We have no means even of ascertaining whether or not He was the only son of his mother; whether the persons referred to in the text were so closely related to Him as the term *brethren* would seem, at first sight, to import; or whether, according

to the latitude with which the Jews employed the term, they were related to Him only in some secondary degree. For anything that appears to the contrary, we should be perfectly justified in taking the word in its literal sense, and regarding them as sons of Joseph and Mary; there being nothing in the scriptures to warrant the notion of the perpetual virginity of our Lord's mother. At all events they were his near relations, or they would not have been designated his brethren; and it is from the nearness of the relationship, that his conduct on the occasion before us derives its peculiar significance.

The light in which his relations regarded Him, is a topic on which the evangelists have been more explicit. Two of them, James, the author of the Epistle which bears his name, and Jude his brother, cousins of Jesus in the first degree, were numbered with the Apostles. But there were others whom St. John calls *his brethren*, and of whom he says expressly that they *did not believe on Him*, and that they even taunted Him with affecting the obscurity of Galilee, in preference to the publicity of Judea and Jerusalem. St. Mark also informs us that his friends had suspicions of his sanity, and that on a certain occasion *they went out to lay hold on Him, for they said, He is beside Himself*. If, however, you only consider that for thirty years Jesus had lived the retired and tranquil life of an ordinary peasant, and

John vii. 8-5.

Mark iii. 21.

that it was not until John the Baptist came forth preaching and baptizing, that He manifested any extraordinary purpose; that He then abruptly resigned all his former occupations, left his mother and his home, and, after being lost for some weeks from all human observation, suddenly emerged from his seclusion in the wilderness, and appeared in an entirely new character, and entered upon a new and unprecedented course of life: that He went itinerating about the country, from village to village, and from synagogue to synagogue, attracting to Him multitudes wherever He went, and preaching to them a new and extraordinary doctrine; speaking, too, with an authority to which no other man had ever pretended; speaking of Himself also, as no other man had ever spoken; declaring Himself in high, mysterious style, the Son of Man, and the Son of God, and as such, demanding the unconditional faith and obedience of all men:—if you consider these things, you will scarcely feel surprised that, while some of his brethren believed on Him, others of them should be only offended and perplexed by his assumption of such superiority. Possessed too, as they were with the popular expectation that the Messiah was to appear as a temporal prince, with all the pomp and circumstance of royalty about him, their prejudices would be shocked not less violently than the prejudices of others, by what they would consider the monstrous

discrepancy between the lowliness of his condition and the loftiness of his pretensions. Even the miracles which He wrought in sustentation of his claims, would only add to their embarrassment, when they saw Him employing his power exclusively for the benefit of others, and either incapable of exerting it in his own behalf, or inexplicably denying both Himself and his family all the advantages that might have been derived from it. How to account for conduct so extraordinary and unnatural they knew not. They were totally at a loss what to think about Him : and were, evidently, rather disposed to adopt the malignant surmise of the Pharisees as to the source and nature of his power, than to acquiesce in the rightfulness of his pretensions. Hence it was that *they went out to lay hold on Him, for they said, He is beside Himself.*

His mother, no doubt, would look upon Him with very different eyes, for none knew, so well as herself, the mystery of his birth. None, so well as herself, knew that the power by which He wrought his mighty works, was the energy of the same *power* by which she had herself been *overshadowed*. But Luke i. 35. even she, however strong her faith in his Messiahship, and however highly she might estimate her high privilege in being the mother of such a son, would feel the blessedness of the distinction sadly embittered by the fears and anxieties which must have continually distressed her. A *sword*, she had

been expressly forewarned, was to *pierce through her own soul*; and already she felt its sharpness when she saw the malice of his enemies, and the multiplicity of his dangers; and thought, as she could not but think, of his poverty and wants, his homeless journeyings, his watchful nights, his exhausting labours, his unexhausted heart. Loving Him as she must have loved Him, the thought of these things must have racked her with constant alarm; and it was, probably, the force of these feelings that led to the incident related in the text. The Pharisees had been consulting together and conspiring against his life; and it may have been to apprise Him of their malicious designs, and perhaps to importune Him to desist from his labours, and to retire for awhile to some scene of security and repose, that his mother and his brethren now sought Him out. They found Him in a house, where a multitude, attracted by a miracle He had just wrought, had assembled so thickly as to obstruct their entrance. Word therefore was sent in to Him, that they stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Yes, He knew their errand: He knew full well the motive for their interference. The heart of his mother, the hearts of his brethren, their doubts and suspicions, her fears and anxieties,—He knew them all: and He knew, too, how far He ought to allow any such considerations to influence his conduct. *He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is*

my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Now, certainly, it was from no want of natural affection that our Lord was led to use this language. It was not that he disregarded or disparaged the tender relationships of life; that He was indifferent to his mother's anxieties, or defective in his attention to her comfort. To no such imputation can He be subject, who, for thirty years, had lived dutifully with her and for her, the stay and solace of her heart; and who, when hanging on the cross, could so far forget his own unspeakable sufferings, as even in that hour of darkness and desertion, to remember the sorrows of her widowhood, and commend her to the care of the disciple, on whose gentleness and fidelity He could best depend. No want of filial tenderness can therefore be discovered in this language, but only the high and sublime sense of official duty by which He was actuated; duty that transcended and absorbed every other consideration. As, before his entrance upon his ministry, He had been faithful to all the responsibilities of private life, so when He came publicly forth, to do the will of Him that sent Him and to finish his work, everything was swallowed up in this. Thenceforth all other relations, all merely personal and private

Matt. xiii. 85.

affections, were merged in the grandeur of his public function ; and in the discharge of this, He recognized no authority but that of his Father which was in heaven. His mother and his brethren—yes, the ties of family connection still subsisted, but He had other kindred beside his kindred after the flesh. There were affinities of a higher order than those of consanguinity however close. He came to constitute a new and spiritual family, linked to each other and to Himself in nobler and everlasting relations, under the especial fatherhood of God. His countrymen might see in Him only *the carpenter's son*, but He declared Himself *the Son of God!* His brethren might see in Him only the son of Mary, but He affiliated Himself upon humanity in the abstract, and announced Himself *The Son of Man!* *Who*, said He, in the full spirit of that sublime designation, *Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?* *And He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother, and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother!*

Neither, again, can we suppose that our Lord intended by this language to disparage the honour arising from their natural relationship to him; nor are we ourselves to underrate it. Monstrous and utterly abominable as is the Romish superstition, which exalts the mother of the man Jesus to such an idolatrous elevation, yet singular, assuredly, and most

eminent was the felicity she enjoyed in giving birth to the Redeemer of the world. *Hail, thou that art* Luke i. 28. *highly favoured,* was the angelic salutation to her: *blessed art thou among women! All generations shall call me blessed,* was the rapturous echo of her own Luke i. 48. heart. *Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked,* once exclaimed a certain Luke xi. 28. woman, transported with admiration of his wisdom and power, and giving utterance by her voice to the natural sentiment of mankind. And this sentiment, so far from discouraging, our Lord recognises and sustains, by availing Himself of it in reference to his disciples. His object evidently was to convey the idea of illustrious distinction. Was it an honour to be the mother of such a son? Was it an honour to be his brethren? Honour as it was, honour unspeakably high, it is an honour not restricted to them, but within the reach of all; *for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* So far indeed from disparaging the distinction attaching to his kindred after the flesh; He avails Himself of it, in order to illustrate the yet superior honour and blessedness which attaches to those who are his kindred after the spirit. *Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it!* Luke xi. 28.

It would seem, too, that He designed to convey the further idea of peculiar sympathy and warm affection. For what do these relationships indicate,

if not a certain peculiarity of regard, springing out of, and corresponding with, the peculiarity of the relationships themselves. In members of the same family, children of the same parents, we naturally look for some deeper sentiment than any arising out of mere acquaintance or friendship, and are shocked when we fail to find it. We expect to see them endeared to each other by the warmth and reciprocity of natural affection, heightened by their early and long association, by their common dependence, their common interests, their common enjoyments. We expect brothers to do for brothers, what we should not be warranted in looking for among those who are less closely allied; and hence, the mutual love which Christians are exalted to cultivate, is, from its depth and disinterestedness, illustrated by the affection peculiarly due to the fraternal relation. *Love as brethren. Let brotherly love continue.* Manifestly, therefore, when our Lord condescended thus to speak of his disciples, He designed to convey the idea of peculiar endearment, peculiar sympathy.

1 Pet. iii. 8.

Heb. xiii. 1.

But there is something yet higher than this. There is a climax in the language which is not to be overlooked. *Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* The love which a brother bears to a sister, has in it a certain exquisite tenderness and refinement, which we do not look for in the love which brother bears to brother. If not deeper,

it is more delicate. If not so confidential, it is more considerate. If not more generous, it is more gentle, corresponding with the gentleness of her sex. But a mother! Oh, what shall be compared with a mother's love, her assiduities, her eager watchful care,—to what a return of love may not she lay claim! And yet, said He, whose heart was the softest that ever beat in human bosom, and whose love and reverence for his mother had been the very perfection of filial piety, *Whoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother!* What, thy mother, Thou all gracious one! Thou art *not ashamed to call us brethren*, but can it be that thy disciples shall be unto Thee even as thy mother? Yes! *whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother!* Heb. ii. 11.

We may suppose, too, that He intended to convey an assurance that He would not only feel, but that He would also manifest towards his spiritual kindred, that peculiar affection which is implied in the nearness of these relations; that He would act towards them in the full spirit of the relationship, and shew them, in their own personal experience, that He does really feel for them as for his brother, and sister, and mother. Certainly, He thus acted towards his disciples while He was upon earth. How patiently He bore with their infirmities, how mildly He reproved them for their faults; how He coun-

· solded, how He comforted, how He kept them !

Prov. xviii. 24. *There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother : and that friend He shewed Himself. Those that Thou gavest me have I kept,* said He, appealing to his Father ; *and none of them is lost, save the son of perdi-*

John xvii. 12. *tion.* It was they that forsook Him, not He that forsook them. *If ye seek me,* He said to the officers that apprehended Him in the garden, *let these go their way. Having loved them He loved them to the end.*

John xviii. 8.
John xiii. 1.

And He is the same in heaven that He was upon earth. Not by Him will the reproach be incurred against which the apostle has warned us :—*If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he had denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

1 Tim. v. 8.

He will suffer them to want no good thing. All power is his both in heaven and on earth, and it is for them that He exercises it ; for their defence, for their preservation, for their present good, and their eternal well-being. Their interest He makes his own. He even identifies Himself with them personally and individually, and says to all that show them kindness, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me !*

Matt. xxv. 40.

Look now, for a moment or two, at the character of those, to whom the privileges and the blessedness of this relationship belong. *Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

And here we would particularly remark the

perfect simplicity, the noble and generous comprehensiveness, of the rule by which He defines his spiritual kindred. It is so like Himself, and it is so unlike us.

There are those who, if we may judge of their spirit by their conduct, seem to rejoice in exclusiveness and intolerance : and to whom, as to the Jews in the days of the apostles, nothing seems so unintelligible and unwelcome as the large liberality of the gospel. The gate of life, strait as it is, is not strait enough for them, but they must fence and obstruct it with theological tests, and arbitrary requisitions of their own. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he should think as they think. You must belong to our communion, you must submit to our authority, you must conform to our observances, you must subscribe to our dogmas, or you cannot belong to the family of Christ. We are the church, and out of our pale is no salvation!—All men, especially all bodies of men, are, indeed, but too apt to arrogate to themselves infallibility ; to set themselves up as the standard of orthodoxy, and to speak in a high imperious tone, as if they, and they only, were in possession of the truth, and to differ from them were to be alien from Christ. But all this is merely sectarianism and self-idolatry ; and oh, how unlike the language and large-heartedness of our divine Master ! Once more let us listen to

Him, the Great Teacher, and let all the schools and churches keep silence before Him! Not communion with this church or that, but doing the will of his Father which is in heaven—this it is that constitutes us his spiritual kindred. Not opinion, but practice; not creed, but conduct; not orthodoxy, but obedience; and not faultless obedience—for that is unhappily impossible to our frailty—but the obedience of love, the loving surrender of self-will to God's will—this is the essence of genuine discipleship! For this is the very mind that was in Christ Jesus: and towards all in whom He beholds it, whatever their personal defects and infirmities, He stretches forth his hand and says, *Behold my mother, and my brethren! For whosoever—no matter what their peculiarities, what their prejudices, what their ignorances, what their errors: whosoever—no matter what they may call themselves, or what they may be called by others:—whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother!*

Alas, that his family on earth should be comparatively so small! that there should be so much room
 Luke xiii. 23. for the apprehensive enquiry, *Lord, are there few that be saved?* Oh, when we think of their seeming fewness, far be it from us to strive yet farther to limit their number by any artificial refinements and restrictions, or by the application of any rule less catholic than his own! Rather let us indulge the

encouraging thought, that there are in every place, and in all societies where his name is named, his *hidden ones*; those, unrecognized perhaps by each other, but whom He *knoweth* as his own; and heartily rejoice in the success of every effort, by whomsoever made, to add to their number. Ps. lxxxiii. 8.
2 Tim. ii. 19.

And be it our high and holy ambition to be ourselves numbered among them, and *to make our calling and election sure*. The day is coming when nothing will be thought honourable but this distinction, nothing desirable but this blessedness. All our earthly relationships will soon be dissolved. The glory of the world will soon be over: for *the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever*. He leaves Christ's family on earth, only to be welcomed into his family in heaven—those *of whom the world was not worthy*, but whom, when *the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father*, He will publicly acknowledge as his brethren, and exhibit them in illustrious association with Himself, and in the immortal fruition of his glory and joy. 2 Pet. ii. 10.
1 John, ii. 17
Heb. xi. 88.
Matt. xvi. 27.

CHRISTIAN ALL-SUFFICIENCY.

PHILIP. iv. 13.

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

St. Paul was no egotist: but whenever in his epistles we find him speaking of himself—and he often has occasion to do so—it is always in a manner worthy of himself, and characteristic both of his high superiority and of his real humility. The greatest men will ever be the last to blazon their own greatness; and this, not only because modesty is almost invariably the companion of merit, but because their standard of excellence being so high, their sense of deficiency is proportionably deep. And thus it certainly was with the Apostle Paul, who, while in his own estimation *less than the least of all saints*, ranks unquestionably amongst the most distinguished of them all.

Eph. iii. 8.

To the Corinthians, indeed, he speaks largely and frequently of himself; for he was under the necessity of vindicating himself from the aspersions of some amongst them who had endeavoured to discredit his apostleship: but his language while full of

soreness, and sometimes even of sarcasm, is full also of humility and self-renunciation. Throughout all the long enumeration of his labours and sufferings, there is not a single word that savours of self-complacency; but on the contrary, as he enters upon the subject with the utmost reluctance, so he pursues it with evident indignation at the necessity which compelled him to the ungracious detail. *I speak as a fool*, he says. *I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me; for I ought to have been commended of you, for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.* All this was ^{2 Cor. xii. 11.} strictly in keeping with the temper and spirit with which in another place he declared himself *the least of the apostles, and not meet to be called an apostle*: all ^{1 Cor. xv. 9.} was strictly in keeping with his own maxim, *He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord; for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.* It was for the Lord's sake that he was ^{2 Cor. x. 17.} thus bold and boastful. It was in the Lord that he gloried; in what Christ the Lord had done in him, and for him, and by him.

The passage before us is of a similar character. It is full of the consciousness of power, and it is full also of the consciousness of weakness. It is full of self-confidence, and it is full also of self-abnegation. In a few remarks let us endeavour to illustrate and enforce the sentiment it embodies. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

The language must evidently be understood with certain limitations. It is clear that when St. Paul says *I can do all things*, he did not mean that all things were *lawful* for him to do; that all things were in that sense within his power. He did not mean that he could do, or that he was at liberty to do, what in itself was wrong, immoral, inexpedient, what was contrary to truth, to justice, to purity, to Christian consistency, *to the doctrine which is according to godliness*. Strength is not communicated to a man to enable him to violate the law of rectitude; nor did the apostle conceive that because *a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*, he was therefore released from all obligations to law, and that nothing could be sinful or wrong in him. Persons indeed, there have been who professed such opinions; but they must have derived their theology from some other source than St. Paul. No such extravagances can be imputed to him who, in his anxiety for others exhorted them to let their *conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ*; and who in his anxiety for himself, *kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, lest that by any means having preached unto others, he himself should be a castaway*.

Nor, again, is he to be understood as referring to his *miraculous* power; though doubtless when he felt the divine energy within him, he shewed himself mighty in deed, as well as in word: but his meaning is to be found in the connection in which the

passage stands. He is gratefully acknowledging the kindness of the Philippian church in remembering him in his imprisonment at Rome, and generously contributing to the supply of his necessities: and he tells them that he rejoices in their beneficence, because it was so welcome an expression of their affection for him, and not because the privations he suffered, and from which their liberality was intended to relieve him, were more than he could otherwise have borne: for, says he, *I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased and how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* His meaning evidently is, that he was able cheerfully to accommodate himself to any circumstances in which he might providentially be placed. He felt himself equal to any trial however severe, any duty however arduous. His experience of life had been so manifold and various, he had been so disciplined and trained by hardship and suffering, that he felt himself equal to any emergency, and was neither to be elated by prosperity, nor crushed by distress. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

And here, when speaking of the secret of his strength, his language must be strictly and literally understood. For nothing is clearer, both from particular express statements, as well as from the

general strain of his epistles, than, that he recognized Jesus Christ as a living, accessible person; that he lived in direct, intimate, habitual communion with Him: and that the strength by which he was enabled to do and to suffer, was strength imparted to him immediately by Christ, without whom he could do nothing. It was not by his own native force of resolution; not by his own courage and fortitude, constitutional or acquired; nor was it from any *past* supply of gracious influence which he had received, that he was enabled to go on confronting danger and enduring affliction, maintaining a calm contented mind in the midst of privation and difficulty; but only by a continual supply of strength directly from Christ Himself. Look, for example, at the account which he gives of his mysterious rapture into Paradise. Lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, *there was given him a thorn in the flesh*,—some grievous infirmity, or some sharp, constant, humiliating affliction,—which he describes as *the messenger of Satan to buffet him*. And for this thing, he says, *I besought the Lord thrice*. Earnestly and repeatedly I prayed to Christ Himself, *that it might depart from me; and He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*. Most gladly, therefore, he continues, *will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*. Here, then, we find him not only communing

directly with Christ, and receiving from Him the assurance of such a constant supply of spiritual strength immediately from Himself, as should enable him to bear up under the infirmity with which he was still to be harassed, but also welcoming his affliction, as the means of his enjoying larger communications of Christ's gracious influences than he would otherwise have been privileged with. And *therefore*, he goes on to say, *therefore do I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake ; for when I am weak then am I strong*: when I am the most sensible of my own utter insufficiency and impotence, then am I strongest in the strength which Christ immediately imparts. In a similar manner he writes to Timothy—*At my first hearing no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me*—filling him with a courage and a fortitude no human countenance could have inspired—and *I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion*. So again he says to the Galatians, *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*: liveth in me 2 TIM. IV. 16-17. GAL. II. 20. by the energy of his own spirit animating and sustaining me. All these, and other similar passages clearly shew that Paul lived in personal and habitual communion with Christ, and that when he speaks in the text of Christ strengthening him, his language must be accepted in its strict and literal meaning.

And this leads us to observe more particularly that the language is to be understood *personally*, not *officially*. It is not Paul, the apostle, that is speaking, but Paul, the man ; the man tried and trained, injured to hardship, and disciplined to contentment by the numberless terrible vicissitudes of his strange eventful life : the man of like passions with ourselves : the man who had *to work out his salvation with fear and trembling*, even as he exhorted others : and when, therefore, he thus tells us of the mastery which he had obtained over himself and over circumstances, and of the strength with which he felt himself endued by Christ—strength which rendered him consciously equal to every duty, every trial, he said only that which every individual Christian ought also to be able to say. Fortitude in suffering, patience in tribulation, contentment with the allotments of divine providence, vigour and fidelity in the discharge of duty—these are obligations resting equally upon all ; and the strength, therefore, by which alone they are to be fulfilled, must also be equally attainable by all. And accordingly he exhorts the Ephesians to *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might* ; he prays for the Colossians that they might be *strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness* : and he says to Timothy, *Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*.

Philp. ii. 12.

Eph. vi. 10.

Col. i. 2.

2 Tim. ii. 1.

This language, we say, ought to be the language of every one of us. Not a single individual amongst us, but ought to be able to say confidently and thankfully, *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me!* But how are we to rise to that condition of soul which will warrant our adoption of it? How are we to become consciously strong with the strength which is in Christ Jesus? Why, only by acting as Paul himself acted, and making the habits of his life the habits of our own.

And what then were his habits?—Why, knowing as we do the thorough honesty of the man, knowing how incapable he was of anything like affectation or hypocrisy, we may be sure that he did not enjoin upon others what he did not practise himself. We may be sure that when he so earnestly admonished them to *continue instant in prayer, to pray without ceasing, to pray always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance*, it was only because he felt the absolute necessity of it himself, and the impossibility of otherwise realizing the presence and the help of Christ. He bowed his knees for others—ay, but he must also have habitually bowed them for himself, or never would others have been the objects of his anxiety. That *boldness* in approaching *the throne of grace* which he encouraged in them, he had himself acquired only by his own constant habit of resorting thither, and laying his heart with all its cares close

upon the heart of Christ. From his own experience he had learned where alone true peace of heart and strength of holy purpose are to be found, and therefore it was that he said—*In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.* This was one great habit of his life. **Philp. iv. 6.** It was thus that he obtained power from on high, **Heb. ix. 27.** and *endured as seeing Him who is invisible.* Without this, he would have been as weak as any other man.

Another habit of his life was to reduce his prayers into practice, and to apply them to every duty that rested upon him, to the smallest as well as to the greatest. Prayer! For what was it that he prayed, if not for strength to do, and strength to suffer, that both officially as an Apostle, and personally as a Christian, he might *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he was called?* The man was in earnest. He felt that he was called to great things: he felt his own insufficiency for them: and therefore he sought the supply of Christ's own spirit to make him sufficient for them. But how was he to know that the strength he needed was vouchsafed, till he exerted himself and brought it into action, and made manifest both to himself and to others the grace of Christ that was in him, by the patience with which he bore affliction, and the vigour with which he discharged duty? The man was in earnest, and therefore he

Eph. iv. 1.

walked circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, making the most of the opportunity, endeavouring in all things to shew himself a pattern of good works, and to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Most touching it is to think of this man, with such a load of care upon him, working as a tentmaker at Corinth, rather than be burdensome to the church, or subject his ministry to suspicion. Beautiful to hear him appealing to the elders of the church at Ephesus and saying, *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Eph. v. 15. Tit. ii. 7-10. Acts xx. 35.

And can we suppose that, in what we are apt to think the smaller duties of life, he was not equally conscientious and exact? Can we suppose that when he laid so much stress upon the necessity of controlling the temper and the tongue in his precepts to others, he was not careful to observe them himself? Or can we suppose that he, who in all his epistles, when the doctrinal topics have been discussed, descends so minutely to all the relations of life, and the duties springing out of them; he who could specify *tatlers* and *busybodies* as a scandal to the church, did not exercise himself to have always, even in the minutest particulars, *a conscience void of* 1 Tim. v. 13.

Acts xxiv. 18. *offence toward God and toward men?* Had he neglected these smaller things, things far greater would have been neglected; for it is by attention to these smaller things that we become capable of greater. It is by patience under the insect annoyances of life that we become fitted to cope with the lion in the way, and by the fidelity with which we discharge life's ordinary duties, that we become prepared for extraordinary demands upon our courage and constancy. It is only by following Paul in these the fixed habits of his life—following him as he followed Christ—it is only thus that we can ever attain to the confidence with which he was inspired, and be able to say with him, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

Now, if we find ourselves unable to adopt this tone of confidence; if we detect in ourselves a disposition to evade duty, to shrink from difficulty, or to flinch from the little sacrifices for Christ's sake to which we are being constantly called; if we are conscious of fretfulness and impatience under the common chagrins and disappointments of life—to say nothing of its severer calamities—if we find ourselves yielding to an indolent, worldly, self-indulgent spirit; if we are consciously weak in ourselves, without being at the same time consciously strong in Christ, it is surely a reason for deep humiliation. For certainly, it is not because there is not strength for us if we seek it. It is not

because Christ is less willing to bestow upon us his grace, than He was to impart it to St. Paul. It cannot be that Christ's heart is changed, or that his love is cooled, and that he is slow to hear—He, who is *the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever!* No. Heb. xiii. 8.

The fault lies altogether in ourselves; in our neglect of that intimate and habitual communion with Him to which he invites us, and in our cold and capricious efforts to bring out our prayers into practice. It is all our own fault, all our own shame.

The consciousness of failure is, however, not to dishearten us. Even Paul did not attain to this confidence at once, as he himself seems to intimate, when he says, *I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.* He had *learned*—yes, but he Philp. iv. 11. had not learned it suddenly, nor had he learned it soon, of that we may be sure: for it is a hard lesson; the very hardest, perhaps, of all lessons; and he would be long in learning it. It is a lesson not to be learned in circumstances of ease and comfort, but only in the school of adversity and the furnace of affliction; and into them, therefore, Paul was cast, and in them he was kept, until he was *instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* That quick temper of his, that fiery impetuous spirit—ah! severe discipline was necessary before they were brought under control. What a life indeed was his! Look again at his second epistle to the Corinthians, written years before this epistle to

the Philippians, and see in that strange catalogue of trials and sufferings, through what a process he had to pass. *Are they, says he, ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I am more : in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times I received forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils amongst false brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* And in addition to this, there were his perils at Jerusalem, where he was rescued from the violence of the populace, only to be taken into Roman custody, and his two years imprisonment at Cæsarea—more galling to him far than the dangers to which his ministerial activity exposed him ; and then his terrible voyage and shipwreck, and his imprisonment at Rome, where he wrote this epistle, and along with all this, *that thorn in the flesh*—that constant, poignant, panging grief, for the removal of which he had prayed so earnestly, but from which he was not to be relieved. What a history ! What a life for a man to live ! But through all this he was called to pass ; and it is not until he has gone through this that we find him saying, *I have learned*

in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. His vocation, however, was peculiar: his natural character was extraordinary: his privileges were singularly great, and his trials therefore were proportionably numerous and severe. To us, Brethren, the lines have fallen in pleasanter places. Our position is different, our trials are lighter, our duties less laborious, and the grace that is in Christ Jesus is freely offered to us all. Appropriate that, earnestly and heartily make the habits of St. Paul's life the habits of your own, and you too, under the gracious discipline of the Father of spirits, will feel yourselves equal to every exigency, able to do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you.

In conclusion:—Far removed from everything incompatible with the deepest christian humility, there is yet a certain healthy self-confidence which is a very possible and most desirable attainment. In every department of human activity, faith in our own ability to do a thing, no matter what, is almost necessary to our doing it at all, and at all events to our doing it well. To acquire this faith in himself, is indeed with every man half the battle of life. Some men never do gain it. They are always so diffident and distrustful of themselves, that they are incapable of a really vigorous effort: and life, accordingly, to them, is little other than an impotent struggle and a disastrous defeat.

The very imagination that one cannot do a thing, is almost certain either to deter from the attempt, or to make it a failure. On the contrary, feel that you *can*, and the simple feeling is of itself almost certain to ensure success. It is so in ordinary life, and it is so in the Christian life. It is just because of this morbid self-distrust, this miserable sickly feeling *I can't*, that many persons who might be useful in the church and in the world, who might be ministering angels to the really weak and incapable, remain inactive and useless, and fritter away their lives in merely dreaming about doing good. Whereas it is by the sound, healthy feeling, *I can*, that all the good that is done is really effected. Most important therefore it is that this faith should be acquired. It may be all very right to preach about man's weakness and nothingness in himself, but it will never do to confine ourselves to that. That is only one half of the truth. It is only the dark side of the shield, and we must look at its bright. We are living under the Gospel. Christ's own words are addressed to us, and *they are spirit, and they are life*. Christ's own Spirit is given to us, and it is not a *spirit of fear* and timidity, *but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*, so that we may be *always confident*, not arrogant, self-conceited, self-righteous, or rash ; but consciously able to do anything and to suffer anything to which in the course of divine providence we may be called. A man, we say, may

John vi. 63.

2 Tim. i. 7.

2 Cor. v. 6.

so grow up to the stature of *a perfect man* in Christ, Ephes. iv. 13. he may live in such intimate and habitual communion with Him, as to become conscious of the strength of Christ within him, bracing, nerving, energizing his spirit ; so that no danger shall daunt, no trouble disturb him, but he shall go calmly and confidently forth, and mountains of difficulty shall vanish at his bidding. Such a man was St. Paul ; and such too we ourselves may and ought all of us to be, and to be able in all humility and thankfulness, but at the same time with all confidence to say, *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.*

SEASONABLE STRENGTH.

DEUT. xxxiii. 25.

“Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days so shall thy strength be.”

THE words are contained in *the blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death*. The mortal summons had come to him, in obedience to which, he was to climb the heights of Pisgah, where, after he had surveyed the promised land, he was to lie down and die. In the prospect, therefore, of his immediate departure, he composed the valedictory song from which the text is taken; wherein, along with the sublimest conceptions of the majesty of the Most High, we are presented with gracious promises and practical principles; all of them clothed in diction highly figurative and beautiful, and adapted therefore to that force of feeling, and that exaltation of thought, which find their fittest and most natural utterance in poetry and song.

The particular blessing in the text relates to the tribe of Asher; and the peculiar imagery in which

the blessing is conveyed, was perhaps determined by the character of the territory allotted to them as their portion—a mountainous country abounding in mineral wealth. It is a promise, however, which, though different in form and phraseology, is substantially the same with many others which are made universally to the household of faith, in all ages of the church; and which, therefore, we may appropriate to ourselves, with all its encouragement and comfort. God says to the whole church, and to each individual believer, *Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be.* Happy the man whose heart receives the promise, and with childlike faith rests confidently upon it.

Let us, in the first place, look at the peculiar significance of the imagery in the text, and then at the moral and spiritual principles embodied in it.

Thy shoes shall be iron and brass. The idea suggested by this language is obviously that of travellers, and travellers on a long and arduous journey. Shoes are for the protection of the feet in walking: and their being of iron and brass is a pretty plain intimation of the character of the road along which the journey lies: a road by no means smooth and easy, but rough, and difficult,—full of hardship. Shoes of such materials are not by any means articles of luxury. Neither for comfort nor pleasure, for recreation nor repose, can they be thought necessary. The stroller in trim gardens, or

flowery meadows, the lounge, the saunterer, may reasonably enough decline the use of such cumbersome superfluities. But men with a long and arduous journey before them require shoes that will last. The difficulty of the road may be thus at once inferred from the nature of the preparations for the journey.

The character of the travellers may also be inferred from it. No delicate and effeminate persons will bear to go sandalled with iron and brass, but such only as are of active, hardy habits, and of masculine strength, fortitude and endurance. Children, whether of an older or a younger growth, would soon grow weary of such accoutrements as these.—How much, then, is taught us of what we ought to be, and of what we have to expect and to do, by just this simple image! If our shoes are to be of iron and brass, it is only because we shall need them. God knows this, and hence his gracious promise.

But these shoes of iron and brass may also be regarded as pieces of armour: greaves for the legs—a mere portion of the traveller's equipment, and just a specimen of the whole. In ancient times, we know, the armour covered nearly the whole body. Not only were there greaves for the legs, but the helmet, the breastplate, the buckler, and the shield over all. The idea in the text may, therefore, be that, not merely of travellers on a journey, but of

soldiers on the march ; and so, when we have the armed foot, we have merely an image from which to evoke the whole man—the man in complete armour, of which his shoes of iron and brass are but a part. Just as the comparative anatomist will, from a single fossil bone, describe to you the form and structure, the nature and habits, of the animal to which it belonged, and set before you the saurian of a former system ; so from this armed foot the whole armed man may be predicated, and the Christian soldier rises at once to your view.

In addition to this, the language of the text suggests to us the diversities and vicissitudes to be expected in the journey, and the courage and fortitude necessary to meet and endure them. Both of these are combined in the latter clause of the text—*and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.* The idea obviously is, that the days of the traveller or the soldier—the scenes through which he has to pass, the incidents that befall him, the circumstances in which he is placed—may be very changeable and diverse ; very different at one time from what they are at another ; and the promise in the figure is, that just according to the circumstance in which he is placed, shall be the spiritual condition of the man himself : just according to the arduousness and dangers of the road, the exigency of his position, the demands upon his courage and patience, shall be the strength and resolution necessary to meet them.

Figures are not to be pushed too far, nor is it necessary to do so in order to extract from them the instruction they contain. But between the Christian life and the course of a journey or pilgrimage, there is a close and striking analogy, which the scriptures not unfrequently allude to, so as to illustrate the one by the other. Imagine, then, for a moment, the varieties and vicissitudes of a journey such as it was in ancient times, and in oriental countries, where iron and brass were not put to exactly the same uses as they are among ourselves, and where travelling was a very different thing from what it is with us. Imagine, then, the traveller on his way, passing through a country clothed with beauty, a smiling landscape before him, a bright and cloudless sky above him, the air all balm, and fragrance, and melody; or halting for a time under the shadow of a rock, with the living water springing at his feet, enjoying the luxury of coolness and repose. But as he resumes his journey the scene changes; and he has to push his adventurous way across a river, or through a forest, or over a morass, or through a burning sandy desert, oppressed with thirst, hunger, and fatigue; exposed, too, to innumerable perils and alarms—the fiery sirocco, the attacks of savage animals, or the assaults of robbers and predatory bands:—or his way lies over a mountain chain, up which he goes toiling and panting through wilds and trackless forests, or along

the edge of yawning chasms and frightful precipices, where a single false step would be destruction; and a tempest overtakes him, and the day suddenly darkens into night; and there, in those howling solitudes, and amidst shelving rocks, and rushing torrents, and the crashing uproar of the elements, he has to pause, and shelter, and watch, till the hurricane has spent its force and passed away. Then he pursues his journey, ever and anon catching among those savage wilds glimpses of enchanting beauty; till, having surmounted these perilous heights, he gains a smoother and securer way. This is not mere fancy: these are the common incidents of travel, and they are touchingly analogous to the varied incidents of life.

Or look at the soldier's career. Sometimes his profession is a mere pastime, and he is enjoying the sweets of peace and rest. At other times he is in circumstances of alarm, and the sweet voice of the morning summons him to arms; and then there are the fatigues and privations of the march and the bivouac: and the surprises of the enemy, the fierce attack, the stubborn resistance, the triumphant pursuit, or the hasty and disastrous retreat, and all the perils and hazards of the long campaign. The vicissitudes of war are like those of the pilgrimage, and both are suggested by the imagery in the text: and the promise is, that however changeful and contrasted these outward circumstances may be, there

shall be that in the state and condition of the inner man which shall be divinely appropriate to them all; so that whether in doing or in suffering, he shall never be tasked beyond his ability, but that according to his day his strength shall be.

These ideas are distinctly and immediately suggested by the figurative language of the text. Let us now look at them in their application to the Christian life.

The first thing, then, to be gathered from these representations is this, that the Christian life is one in which we shall often be called to *endure hardness*. So far from being a life of ease and self enjoyment; a state of tranquil and contemplative repose; it is a life of activity, of effort, of hardship. A statement this, it is true, which seems contradictory to various declarations in the Scriptures, in which very different notions of it would seem to be conveyed. For is it not said that Wisdom's *ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*? Does not our Lord say that his *yoke is easy* and his *burden light*? Does not St. John say that the commands of God *are not grievous*? How then are we to reconcile such statements with this representation of severity and hardness? Precisely the same difficulty is to be found in relation to a life of worldliness and sin. The common representation of the path of sin is that it is a path of pleasure, seductive and alluring, and smooth and easy from

2 Tim. ii. 8.

Prov. iii. 17.

Matt xi. 30.

1 John v. 8.

the force of natural inclination alone : and yet *the way of transgressors* is declared to be *hard*, as most Prov. xiii. 15. assuredly it is : far harder—more thronged with trouble and grievance, and all that wears and wastes the spirit—far harder, even in its downward course, than the way of duty however steep and rugged. There are restraints and checks which the wicked have to break through, obstacles to surmount, hazards to run, pains and anticipations to endure, which makes the way *that leadeth to destruction*, broad as it is, far more troubled and distressful than the *narrow way which leadeth unto life*. But consider Matt. vii. 13, 14. for a moment what is essential to our present state of being, and to the disordered condition of our moral nature ; and you will immediately see that the Christian life must of necessity be a life of effort and hardness.—We are in the flesh : and we have the propensities, and appetites, and affections, peculiar to our animal nature, all of which have to be restrained and corrected, and brought into subjection. We have also the higher powers and capacities of the spirit, which have all to be cultivated and developed, and established in their rightful ascendancy. Now, the first thing in life is attention to the animal nature, concession to the impulses of sense and appetite ; and as these are indulged, and the flesh gains the mastery over the spirit, it becomes a hard thing indeed for a man to deny himself, to *keep under the body*, and to 1 Cor. ix. 27.

establish the mastery of the spirit over the flesh. With all the influences of divine grace disposing and enabling him *to will and to do*, it is only after long and arduous struggling, only after many conflicts, many reverses, that the triumph is achieved. The *result*, indeed, is peace and joy and blessedness which the world can neither give nor take away; but that which comes first is hardness. It is swimming *against* the tide. And even afterwards, when the tastes and inclinations and habits are corrected and purified, effort is still necessary in order to swim with it. The man is, indeed, no longer the servant of sin, the slave of appetite and passion. He is emancipated from that thralldom. *He obeys from the heart that form of doctrine which has been delivered unto him*, and rejoices in the freedom of *the law of liberty*; but this liberty in things moral and spiritual, even as in things civil and political, as it is the result only of hard struggling and various conflict, so it is to be preserved only by constant vigilance and strenuous determination.

Philip ii. 18.

Rom. vi. 17.

James i. 25.

Brethren, let none of us ever calculate upon exemption from hardship. Young persons especially stand in need of the admonition, prone as they are to take such sanguine views of life. Ah! it stretches out before their mental eye in beautiful perspective, and all seems easy to their hopes and ardours; but let none of them be deceived by the flattering prospect, which often proves false just in proportion as

it is fair. Let none of them think that the practice of the Gospel is as easy as the profession of it, or that they can, without the utmost energy of resolution, attain to those habits of piety and virtue, which make the path of Christian duty a path of pleasure. Rather let them seriously count the cost, and prepare for much in every day they live, that will severely tax their faith and constancy. Let them take a lesson from the experience of their childhood. It was not an easy thing to teach them any useful knowledge, nor was it an easy thing for them to learn: and life, they will find, little other than a long and laborious lesson: a severe school, which often and often will task them to the utmost. Yes: the sentence passed upon our first forefather, *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*, still Gen. III. 19. operates with unexhausted force, so that nothing really valuable is to be obtained in any other way. It is so in boyhood, and it is so in manhood. It is so everywhere and in all things, in knowledge, in literature, in art, in every calling, and profession, and accomplishment. Effort, effort, effort: stern, persevering, indomitable effort—in every department of excellence this is the grand qualification for success. All the help that benevolence can afford or ingenuity devise are nothing without this. And this is the law of the Christian life, just as it is of the life secular and professional.

We may observe in the next place, that in the

Christian life we may expect not merely hardness, but great diversities of hardness. Look at the different sources from which these diversities arise. There are, for instance, the successive stages of the natural life—youth, early manhood, advancing years, old age; in these different stages how different are men's thoughts, and views, and feelings, and duties, and the kind of strength, therefore, which they need for each! How full of light and joy is virtuous youth, with its cheerfulness of heart, its buoyancy of spirit, its lively sensibilities, its earnest pursuit of excellence, its delight in goodness, its delight in God; a youth like David's, the music of whose harp was but the irrepressible prompture of the rich and gladsome harmony within him! A few years onward, and there are the conjugal and parental relations, with their duties and responsibilities, their cares and anxieties, and perhaps too, their griefs and disappointments. What a change then, both in head and in heart! What clouds begin then to gather round the sun, and cast their grave shadows over the spirit! The anxieties, the labours, the trials inseparable from that stage of life—how different from the freedom and lightheartedness of youth! That which was suited for the boy will never do for the man, laden as he is with accumulated cares, and the interests of others as well as his own: but for sterner duties he needs a robuster spirit and more various strength. A few years still onwards, and

life is in the wane ; and then come the infirmities of age : the loss of energy, the loss of ardour, decrepitude of spirit, the decay of mental power as well as of bodily vigour : and yet with all, life's cares and burdens none the lighter ! How different the kind of strength that old age needs !

These changes in the progress of the outward and physical life cannot be without their corresponding effects upon the moral and spiritual man ; and in the order of nature, and by the law of a kind providence, we find, generally speaking, something adapted to them all ; but in the Christian life, the life which is to live and grow through all these changes, we want something more than nature ; we want *grace*—communications of divine influence to sustain and invigorate, and to keep us on the advance, that *though our outward man perish, the inward* 2 Cor. iv. 18. *man may be renewed day by day.* And all these changes come, therefore, within the comprehension of the promise, *as thy days so shall thy strength be.*

There are also the vicissitudes which may occur at any stage of life ;—visitations of affliction, sickness, sorrow ; the sudden or the gradual incursions of death with its heart-rending bereavements—the dark cloud gathering over the tabernacle, and enveloping it in darkness that may be felt :—or changes in a man's circumstances and social position, the rapid acquisition of wealth, or, what is more common, ruinous reverses of fortune, wrecking him

perhaps at the very outset of life, or yet more disastrously, towards its close. Things these, of common occurrence, but not on that account the less painful and trying. No such changes can, indeed, occur, no great alterations in a man's circumstances can possibly take place, without seriously affecting his religious life, shocking and shaking it to its very centre, trying his Christian principle and Christian consistency by a test, the very apprehension of which is sufficiently formidable; so that there is a manifest necessity for something appropriate to meet them, that *he may be able to withstand in the evil day*. But as all such vicissitudes and fluctuations occur naturally in the order of divine providence, so, in the order of grace, there is that which is adapted to them all, and to the Christian believer, therefore, the assurance comes—Whensoever such vicissitudes may occur, and whatever their nature may be; whether thy day be sunny and bright, or dark and stormy; neither shall prosperity make thee giddy, nor adversity make thee faint; but my grace shall be suited to thy necessity; thou shalt find within thee that which is adapted to every exigency of duty or of trial, of service or of suffering: *thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be*.

There are the changes also that affect first and immediately *the inward man*, and which are perceptible only there:—languor of mind, dejection of

spirit, deadness of feeling, the conscious and almost total loss of spiritual sensibility ; a chill and winter of the heart, arising from one knows not what, but clouding and obscuring the whole range of thought and opinion, going to the very root of religious principle, and strangely damping Christian ardour, and incapacitating for the discharge of Christian duty. Who that knows anything of the glow of devotion, but must also know something of these seasons of coldness and gloom ? As a gracious preventive, therefore, or a timely and effectual antidote to all such distressful conditions of feeling, the promise in the text is benignantly addressed to us : and cases there have been in which it has touched the drooping spirit with electric force, flooding with heaven's own sunshine the dark benighted mind, and turning *the shadow of death into the morning*.

Amos v. 8.

There are also the various modes in which a man is affected by the changes that are taking place around him : changes in the state and prospects of society, in the form and direction of public opinion, in the aspect of politics, or in the condition and circumstances of the church, and the relations between the church and the world. The spirit of evil ever alert, and ever varying its antagonism to truth and righteousness, may at times appear unusually active and formidable ; enlisting in its service the highest intellects, and assailing the faith with every available weapon that philosophy, and criticism, and

advancing science can supply ; while with auxiliary activity *the mystery of iniquity* may be busy within the church, labouring for the restoration of the old Romish Sacerdotalism, with all its evils and harlotries, all its abominations in rite and doctrine, so attractive and fascinating to the young, the ignorant, the frivolous, and the weak. Periods these, full of menace and alarm, that summon loudly to resistance every lover of the truth, and those more especially, whose duty it is to confront every new form of error as it arises, and every old form as it revives and reappears. Times, too, there have been, and may yet be again, of higher duty and severer trial : times that demand not merely resistance, but resistance the stubbornest and sternest, resistance *unto blood*. To this our forefathers were summoned, and well did they wage their holy warfare, *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might !* To this, too, notwithstanding all the boasted enlightenment of the age, may their sons again be summoned : to a similar conflict with surrounding apostacy and papal usurpation : and that they may be *valiant for the truth*, and *fight the good fight* in the noble spirit of their fathers, there comes this grand promise, sounding through the soul like *the voice of the archangel*, and *the trump of God*—*Thy shoes shall be iron and brass and as thy days so shall thy strength be.*

Now, we are to believe this. And this of itself is not an easy thing to do, and is no unapt illustration

of the hardness of the Christian life. Very few do believe it; very few will believe it. God calls them to such or such a duty. He sets it directly and palpably before them, and says, This do, and as thy day so shall thy strength be! And though the heart within them hears and knows his voice, and distinctly sees and feels the duty, they hesitate, and shrink from it, and say, No! We dare not. We cannot. We have not the means. We have not the power. And thus God's work goes often unaccomplished, unattempted, solely through want of faith in this identical promise.

We are, however, to believe it: to take it and trust it, as the promise of God; of Him who cannot lie. But we are to receive it intelligently; to understand it *as men*, who are to consider that the promise will not be indiscriminately fulfilled, but only in connection with certain circumstances and conditions which it obviously implies. In order that it may be verified in the experience of any man it of course supposes that he is really a traveller, really a soldier: that he confesses himself a *stranger* and a *pilgrim on the earth*, and declares plainly that he Heb. xi. 13, 16. is seeking a *better country, that is, a heavenly*: that he is really enlisted under the banner of the Cross, and knows what he is doing, what service he has to perform, who is his captain, and what are his commands. In other words, the promise is made only to those who are in earnest to know the will of God,

and to do it. It is addressed not to the proud, the self-willed, the self-sufficient; nor to the lukewarm, the irresolute, the double-minded, the half-hearted: but to those alone who, with singleness of eye and simplicity of purpose, are willing and wishful to know the right and do it, feeling that they themselves are nothing, and that God is all. To such it is that it is made, and to them it comes in all its gracious significance—*Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be.*

It is also to be considered, that God fulfils this promise by increasing strength in proportion as it is exerted. It is so in nature, and it is so in grace. It is not by sudden and miraculous communications of power that he enables us either to do or to suffer in his service, but by working in us according to the laws and constitution of the nature He has Himself given us. And as it is by practice that a man attains to excellence in any pursuit; as it is by vigorous exertion that he increases his muscular strength, so it is by the faithful discharge of ordinary duties that he is prepared for such as are extraordinary. It is by little sacrifices that we are prepared for greater, and by the common trials of our daily life, for those of more arduous emergencies. It was by the hardy habits of a shepherd's life, that the youthful David found courage to grapple with the lion and the bear; and his struggles with the lion and the bear, prepared the young stripling of

Israel for his encounter with the gigantic champion of the Philistines. Have you a little strength? *Exercise yourselves unto godliness, and you will grow stronger and stronger. Neglect it, leave it "to rust in you unused," and you will soon lose the little that you have. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.* 1 Tim. iv. 7.
Matt. xxv. 29.

And, let it never be forgotten that a man is kept up to his position and duty, by waiting upon God; living in habitual communion with Him. It is *they that wait upon the Lord that shall renew their strength: that shall run and not be weary: that shall walk and not faint.* This is the secret of all our spiritual vigour, and in this we may all rejoice. Repair to the fountain of life and strength, and there drink in fresh and refreshing supplies. Water always seeks its own level. Let it descend from a mountain eminence, and it will rise to an equal elevation: and if we, by habitual waiting upon God keep up the connection between heaven and our own hearts, not only will our strength never be exhausted, but there will be streams of divine grace ever flowing down into the soul, and raising up the soul with them to the divine fountain from which they spring.

PRAYER IN TROUBLE.

PSALM lxxxvi. 7.

“In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee, for Thou wilt answer me.”

Job v. 7.

MAN, said the suffering Patriarch, as he sat bemoaning himself in the ashes, “*man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward:*” and the sentiment, though the melancholy utterance of a mind distempered with affliction, is yet verified by universal experience. Our condition here is a condition of trouble, and such, sooner or later, we all find it. Not, indeed, that it is all trouble, and that there is no such thing as happiness in the world; but that the happiness is so chequered, so precarious, so deceptive; it is liable to such sudden and disastrous interruptions, and is associated with so much to harass and disturb us, that the intervals of pure enjoyment are few indeed, and far between. Look at the faces that throng our streets, and how few do you see except those of childhood and youth in which any genuine cheerfulness is visible! As years however increase, cares increase with them. Time only deepens the furrows which trouble first traces.

The new connections we form in life, the new relations into which we enter, the new scenes of exertion in which we are called to engage—of whatever pleasure they may be productive—prove all of them new sources of trouble. We may widen the range of our enjoyment, but we at the same time enlarge the circle of our anxieties. Our roses grow upon thorns. *Even in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.* *The spirit* Eccles. i. 7. *of a man will* however sustain his infirmity. *Natural* Prov. xviii. 14. courage and resolution, a sanguine temperament, the necessity of continual exertion, friendly sympathy, domestic comfort, the common consolations of life, will enable him to bear a heavy burden with tolerable ease, and to sustain the shock of many distresses with unbroken fortitude.

But there are sorrows of a severer aspect and a sharper tooth; troubles to which common troubles are as nothing: troubles that cast down and crush the strongest, healthiest spirits. Such, for instance, are the woes which sickness and death so often inflict:—the loss of those in whose existence our own seemed bound up; the light of whose smile made home lovely; the parent, the child, the husband, the wife, the desire of our eyes taken away with a stroke. Such are the distresses that so frequently arise from disastrous reverses of fortune; or those which are necessarily associated with poverty, desperately but ineffectually struggling with adversity.

Such are the sorrows that spring from the treachery of those, whose friendship has been too easily believed and too fondly trusted. Such also are the troubles which spring, not like the foregoing from circumstances and causes beyond our control, but which follow as the natural consequences of our own folly and imprudence, our vices or our crimes ; and which fall upon the heart with all the weight with which guilt and remorse can aggravate disaster. We might easily add to the catalogue, but it is long enough already.

And of such troubles, in all their numberless varieties, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the world is full. Assuredly they are far more common than will readily be believed by those, who, as yet happy and prosperous, and characterized by the thoughtlessness so natural to prosperity, mingle gaily and credulously in the dance of life, unsuspecting of the disguises in which the world is wont to masquerade. They are however, so common ; they enter so essentially into the economy of our mortal condition, that as no human being is secure from them, so, sooner or later, in some shape or other, they fasten upon every heart. And periods of such affliction, where all common consolations are totally unavailing, are emphatically *days of trouble*. They stand out mournfully marked in the calendar of our experience, and form epochs in history of our life.

Now, to such troubles what has the world to oppose? What antidote, what remedy, what alleviation has it to prescribe? When common consolations fail; when the spirit, wounded and oppressed, rejects the offered balm of human kindness; when friendship, and wealth, and wonted pleasures are alike ineffectual to soothe, what more has the world to offer? Alas! painful as these calamities in themselves may be, it is a yet sorer anguish to know and to feel that the world has no medicine for “a mind diseased,” but that in the hour of utmost need it leaves the sufferer to minister to himself. And melancholy as is the spectacle of a strong mind writhing under affliction, it is a yet sadder thing to see it gathering itself up in the stern solitude of an incommunicable grief, or involving itself deeper in the cares and perplexities of life, endeavouring to forget its present misery in the excitement of new and unknown anxieties. Yet how often is this the case! How many are they who, stricken and afflicted, go mourners all their days, like *Rachael weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they were not!* How many are they, who, Jer. xxxii. 15. with aching hearts, seek to beguile the sense of grief in scenes of gaiety and dissipation, looking sadly to time as their only cure! How many they, who, with a fiercer passion, plunge into the worse excesses of intemperance, seeking in delirious excitement or the stupors of a drunken sleep, a respite from the cares

that gnaw within ! And how many too are they, who, heartsick, and forlorn, and weary of the burden of life, or beset with difficulties from which they can discern no other escape, yield to desperate impulses and the last temptation ! But so it is. The world has no antidote for the world's sorrows ; but

2 Cor. vii. 10. *the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee ! This was the language of a man, who, from a variety of causes, the persecution of his enemies, the infidelity of his friends, the ingratitude of his family, from the flagrancy also of his own transgressions, from all those causes, in short, which operate in the production of our own sorrows, had had a large experience of suffering and grief. He had often and long been in the school of adversity, and there he had learned wisdom. He had proved the futility of all worldly consolation in the day of trouble, and had learned to betake himself to *the Everlasting arms* as his only refuge. He had passed through many distresses which, but for this, must have overwhelmed him. *I had fainted*, he elsewhere says, *unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living !* This was his stay—faith in God, in his goodness, his mercy, his unalterable fidelity, his gracious purposes, his readiness to hear, his willingness to save,—this was his only stay, but this was enough : *I had fainted unless I had believed* : but thus believing he was sustained through all his sufferings,

Deut. xxxiii. 27.

Ps. xxvii. 13.

and delivered from all his fears. And now we behold him, from his experience of the divine goodness reassuring his confidence in the divine promises. We behold him, sensible of the precariousness of all earthly good, and conscious of his own utter weakness and need, anticipating and preparing against the approach of calamity. And here we have his resolution: *In the day of my trouble—whatever the refuge to which others may resort—In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee, for Thou wilt answer me.*

Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground. Chance and fate are Job v. 6. both alike excluded from the philosophy of the Christian. We know—possessing, as we do, the scriptures of truth—we know that we are neither the playthings of accident nor the victims of necessity: but that whatever may be the immediate causes of our troubles, whether they arise from our own folly and wickedness, or from the folly and wickedness of others, or simply from the operation of what we call natural causes, they are all under the control of Him, our heavenly Father, by whom *the very hairs of our head are all numbered.* From Matt. x. 30. his hand it is that we receive good and that we receive evil. *I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these* Isa. xlv. 7. *things.* However obvious and simple, therefore, or however complicated and obscure the instrumen-

talities by which our troubles are immediately brought upon us, the part of wisdom, the duty of the Christian, is manifestly to look through all secondary agencies, and in the day of trouble, humbly and explicitly to acknowledge the hand of God.

But that resolution of the Psalmist includes far more than this:—*In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee.* For in all the dealings of divine providence with us there is a design most merciful and gracious. They are not the mere arbitrary operations of sovereign power or irresponsible caprice, for *the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy; and doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.* Nor are they regulated only by certain general principles which have no relation but to certain large and general results; for the whole tenure of scripture serves to teach us that they are methods of individual trial and discipline, and, as such, must be adapted to the peculiarities of our individual characters. Merely, therefore, to acknowledge the hand of God is but little. The part of wisdom is to *hear the rod as well as who hath appointed it*; to mark the design of the dispensation and to meet it: to recognise the discipline and to act conformably to it. And hence the Psalmist's resolution—*In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee*—because this is the real and most gracious design of affliction, to reclaim us to Himself; to draw us out of the world; to make

James v. 11.

Lam. iii. 33.

Micah vi. 9.

us feel that this is not our portion nor our rest; to shatter our self-confidence, to abase our pride, to shew us to ourselves in all our poverty and helplessness, our absolute dependence upon Him for everything we have and hope for; and thus to bring us to Himself as *all our salvation, and all our desire.* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5

Because they have no changes, says the Psalmist, therefore they fear not God. It is the natural tendency Ps. lv. 19. of uninterrupted prosperity to blind us to the hand that leads and feeds us: to make us forget both God and ourselves: to forget both what we are and what He is: to inflate us with pride and self-sufficiency like that of the Assyrian monarch, when he walked in the palace of Babylon, and in the elation of his spirit, exclaimed, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?* He, however, who *knoweth our frame, remembereth that we are* Ps. ciii. 14. *dust,* and out of pure compassion to our infirmities He brings us into trouble that we may remember it too; and that, feeling our utter destitution without Him, we may seek Him with a pure heart, fervently. *I will go, He says, and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek me early.* This the Psalmist Hosea v. 15. well knew was the design of affliction, and in the spirit of that wisdom which cometh from above, he frames his resolution accordingly:—*In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee.*

Consider also that prayer is the divinely appointed means of consolation in distress. *Is any among you afflicted*, writes the apostle James, translating into precept the Psalmist's practice, *let him pray*.—One of the most benign and beautiful provisions of nature is that by which the mind, when unduly excited or oppressed, can sometimes relieve itself in tears. Who but has often felt as if his heart must have burst with the fulness of unutterable emotion, but for the timely relief of tears? The tears however came, and in the very act of weeping, the overcharged heart was gradually lightened of its load. Who but has often proved the cheering influence of sympathy—how, in the very act of telling your sorrows to a friend in whose affection you can confide, you seemed to discharge your bosom of half its sadness, or to gain an accession of energy and hope which enabled you to bear up under your troubles with a stronger mind? Now there is a similar efficacy in prayer. The very act of praying is itself a relief and solace, which in the economy of grace is mercifully vouchsafed to the troubled spirit, just as, in the order of nature and society, tears and friendly communion are provided as vents and outlets of excessive emotion. You cannot, indeed, always weep; for there are feelings “too deep for tears.” You cannot always pour out your griefs into a friendly ear, however ready it may be to receive them; for there are

sorrows that defy sympathy, and which language cannot utter. But there is no such impediment to the exercise of prayer. There is no obstacle to the sighing of a broken heart. No need is there of language in calling upon Him who hears the young ravens when they cry. No form of words is necessary to make known our griefs to Him, who, in all Is. lxiii. 9. our affliction, is Himself afflicted. You have but to go humbly and earnestly to *the throne of grace*, Heb. iv. 16. where Christ your Saviour sits exalted for you; you have but to present yourself there before Him, with the simple, single, fixed desire that He will in his own way manifest to you his mercy; and though you should lie voiceless before that throne, unable to articulate a word or even to utter a sigh, yet in the very act, the very effort of thus lifting up your soul to Him, you will feel a relief even more grateful than tears; you will find consolation far sweeter than any that human sympathy can afford; you will feel a solace and a strength gently stealing into your heart, soothing your anguish, and stilling your fears, and encouraging your hope, and enabling you to kiss the rod, and bless the hand that smites you.

Consider also the promises so graciously addressed to believing prayer. *Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.* This is the promise of Him, without whose permissive will the trouble cannot come, and who, as He maketh the day dark with night, turneth also the

shadow of death into morning. *Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee!* How, he, indeed, says not; neither does He declare *when*. These things remain secret in the counsels of his own will. His promise is simply to *deliver*. The deliverance, too, may neither in time nor in manner be in accordance with that to which our own wishes incline. It may be speedy, or it may be protracted. It may be by a sudden release, or it may be by a gradual extrication. It may be through the instrumentality of our own exertions, or it may be through the unsought agency of others. And as with respect to these things the promise is silent, so neither does it become us to prescribe them. No: He demands submission to his will: He demands faith in his goodness: He demands patience for the fulfilment of his word. But that word he has pledged. He has staked his veracity as our guarantee for deliverance. *Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him. I will set him on high because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.* This is our security: the security on which the Psalmist reposed when he built up his holy resolution—*In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee, for Thou wilt answer me.*

Observe, however, the precise posture of the

Psalmist's mind. He is not meditating a merely *distant* purpose, and thinking, as many have often thought—In the day of my trouble I will call upon *Him*—and then let the purpose pass away, to be recalled and acted upon only where the occasion shall demand it: but, In the day of my trouble I will call upon *Thee*. He is in the very act of calling upon God while thus resolving to make Him his refuge in distress. He does not wait till the exigency shall arrive; no: we behold him *now* in the posture of a suppliant before the throne; we behold him *now* in that very sanctuary which is then to be his shelter; cherishing *now* that faith, employing *now* that prayer, which in the season of calamity is to be his consolation and deliverance. And assuredly, if it be the part of wisdom to call upon God in the day of trouble, it is a yet higher wisdom to anticipate that day, and to provide against its approach, by now securing an interest in his favour. It must be a wretched thing to have to search for an asylum, when the hurricane is raging around us and threatening to sweep us away. And there is but one avenue to the throne of grace; and though that avenue is always open, yet it must be often trod to be confidently entered: and in the dark night of distress, and amid the hurry and confusion of a troubled mind, it may not be so readily found. We may flatter ourselves *now* that it will be an easy thing to pray, when prayer becomes our evident and

only resource ; but, alas, for human folly and presumption ! that trust in the divine promises, that confidence in the divine mercy with which the Psalmist was animated, is a state of mind which is not immediately to be realized. That faith, without which prayer is impossible, is no sudden acquisition. That enmity to God, that reluctance to seek Him, which is the characteristic of the natural mind, is not instantly, and at any moment, just when necessary, to be subdued. It is not in some alarming emergency, under the impulse of a panic terror, or in the deep dejection of a heavy sorrow, that you can look up hopefully to Him whose face you have never hitherto sought, or that you can discern Him as a gracious and reconciled Father, whom hitherto you have avoided as a foe. There is but too much reason to fear, lest the anguish of your soul, instead of discovering to your view the lustre of his loving-kindness and compassion, should but thicken the darkness in which He dwells : lest a condemning conscience should transform into a prophet of wrath the trouble which is sent as a messenger of mercy ; and instead of being led to the rock which is higher than we, you should shrink from it with dismay as from a frowning precipice, in which your fears can descry only menaces of destruction. Oh ! be assured that to delay seeking his face until distress drives you into his presence, and when you feel that, but for your distress, you would still coldly avoid Him :

to restrain prayer before God until it is wrung from you by the fierce grasp of calamity, is the very way to fill you with distrust, and to keep despair upon your spirit. For what *then* can be your confidence, what *then* can be your hope, when you thus come to tell Him of your sorrows, while you have never confessed to Him your sins? When you thus seek his succour, while you have never sought his forgiveness? When you thus implore his mercy, while your heart is still callous to his love? Ah! this is not prayer. This is not that cry to which his ear is open. Your own conscience must tell you, that thus to rush into his presence is not confidence, but audacity; is not faith, but presumption; and if you thus wait until *distress and anguish come upon you*, extorting a wild cry for deliverance, you will but too surely verify his own terrible warning: you may *call upon Him, but He will not answer*: you may *seek Him early, but you will not find Him*. Instead of Prov. i. 27. stilling the tempest of your woes, you will hear an awful voice, rising above the roar of the whirlwind, laughing at your calamity, and mocking your fear! No: it is not to such presumption that the promise is made. Listen again to the declaration we have just recited: *Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.* Prov. i. 28.

Brethren, to all of us there is a day coming, and how soon we know not, when, however we may

slight these considerations now, we shall feel them in all their force. There is the day of death ; there is the day of judgment. But will you wait till the terrors of death shall compass you about ? Will you wait till the dread glimpses of eternity which then may open to you, shall rouse you to a wild and frantic prayer ? Why, even in that you may be deceived. For then, when lying helpless on the bed of sickness, no terror may assail you. No alarming presage of eternity may disturb your insensibility. No lurid gleamings of the fire that never shall be quenched may flash across your conscience. You may be hardened to an impracticable apathy. You may sink into a sullen and brutelike repose. But—there is yet another day when you will awake to a perception infinitely vivid of the real exigences of your condition : a day of unutterable, unimaginable trouble, when, instead of *calling* upon God, you will stand overwhelmed and self-condemned, speechless before the throne. Oh ! if you would not rush into that ruin, now in the time of your ease, now in the day of your prosperity, make Him your friend who then will be your judge, that your conflict with the last enemy may be a day of triumph, not of trouble. *Acquaint yourselves with Him now, and be at peace, that you may have boldness in the day of judgment,* and may meet his summons with a serene and smiling face, and be welcomed by Him into that world, where prayer shall be no more, but shall be exalted into everlasting praise.

Job. xxii. 21.

1 John iv. 17.

THE REJECTED ENQUIRER.

1 SAMUEL xxviii. 6.

“And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”

LIFE is change, unceasing change; and one of the most affecting things in life, is to meditate upon the changes that men individually undergo as life advances with them. Regarding only the changes in the outward man, one cannot without sadness consider, how time, like the moth, consumes beauty away; how the fairest features gradually put on darkness; how the stoutest limbs grow feeble, and the keenest senses fail; till at length, wasted and worn out, and bending with the weight of years, a shrunken form goes tottering along the brink of the grave, the wreck only of that which once it was. There is something deeply touching in the thought that the aged pilgrim of to-day was the sprightly, vigorous youth of a few years ago; and that the child now sporting before you in all its gleeful activity, is gradually advancing to a like decrepitude. And this is a change which is passing upon us all. Every day is doing its destined work. Every moment leaves its footmark somewhere.

If this, however, be an affecting consideration, how much more affecting is it to meditate on the changes that take place in the inward man. In some, indeed, the change is only beautiful and cheering, exhibiting more and more decisive indications of the regenerate mind and the new creature. A beautiful thing, surely, it is to see, as sometimes may be seen, a child like the child Samuel, growing in wisdom as he grows in stature ; as he rises into manhood advancing also spiritually *unto a perfect man* ; as years increase, discovering new graces, and the fruits of the spirit in richer abundance ; as the outward man decays, renewed in the inward man day by day ; his faith strengthening as his senses fail ; his immortal principle then most robust and vigorous, when his mortal frame is dissolving and fast returning to its dust. Most frequently, however, the changes of character which come within notice, are of a melancholy cast ; changes from good to bad, from bad to worse ; a gradual declension to indurated worldliness, and incurable depravity. How often, indeed, is the promise and flower of youth completely blasted ! Virtuous principles and amiable dispositions, in their early bloom so full of promise, how often, when exposed to the influences of the world, are they corrupted by evil associations and supplanted by habits of vice, and thus on, in lamentable deterioration, till character is lost, and health destroyed, and the prospects blighted ; and

Ephes. iv. 13.

the once fair and hopeful youth, abandoned from everything honest, and pure, and lovely, and of good report, is tossed an outcast upon the world, to perish prematurely in wretchedness and shame! Such instances, we know, abound: almost every newspaper records them, and they are as awful as they are common.

It is indeed terrible to think of what men may become, and what they do become, by consenting to the influences of evil. It is a terrible thing, when contemplating the possibilities of life, to look upon a little child, and to think how that innocence, now so lovely and engaging, may hereafter darken into the most frightful depravity: or to look upon a man all blackened with guilt and infamy, and to think that he was once a little child! But it is a yet more terrible thing, for a man to be conscious of this shocking deterioration in himself: to look back upon the past and to think, that there was once a period when, unstained by actual guilt, had it pleased God to call him hence, his spirit would have flown straight off to heaven; whereas now, should his soul be required of him, it would only be to be banished into the outer darkness. And yet how many are there, who, if they ever venture to reflect at all, must think of themselves thus!

Look at Saul: at first humble, modest, retiring, prudent, associated even with the prophets. It is said, indeed, that *God gave him another heart*; a spirit 1 Sam. x. 9.

of wisdom and understanding qualifying him for the high function to which he was exalted. And for a time he appears to have demeaned himself with discreteness; bearing his faculties meekly, and commanding the respect of all his people. But it was only for a time. Elated with power, his humility soon swelled into pride, his meekness into arrogance, his energy and prudence into rashness and presumption. He had reigned but two years over Israel, when we find him usurping the function of the priesthood, and offering sacrifices in daring viola-

1 Sam. xiii. 8-14. tion of the divine appointments. Soon after, we find him entangled by the violence of his temper in the consequences of a hasty vow, and prevented only by the indignant interference of the people

1 Sam. xiv. 24-45 from becoming the murderer of his own son. After this he is especially commissioned to go and execute the divine judgments upon the Amalekites. In this capacity he is sent forth, with instructions the most solemn and explicit, utterly to destroy them and all they had: to destroy and spare not. Instead however of accomplishing his mission, he did not do half that he was sent to do. He utterly destroyed the people indeed; and everything that was vile and refuse, anything that was not worth the sparing, that he destroyed utterly; but he spared Agag their king alive; and the best of the cattle and all that was good—these, instead of destroying them utterly as he was commanded, he covetously and vain-

1 Sam. xv.

gloriously spared, as the fruits and trophies of his victory; violating not only the express letter of his instructions, but the very spirit of his commission, changing the whole character of the transaction, and perverting that which was designed as a distinct unambiguous act of divine retribution, into a mere predatory enterprise, or exploit of arms. This was the turning point in his history. Perverse and irreclaimable, from this time forth *the Spirit of the Lord is said to have departed from him.* Left to him-^{1 Sam. xvi. 14.} self he became moody, melancholy, ferocious; a prey to evil imaginations and Satanic impulses. Suspicion, jealousy, malice, revenge, all dark and hateful passions spread their poison through his soul, hurrying him into frantic excesses and the wildest crimes. At length, after a protracted and troublous reign, we behold him, in the sorrowful evening of his life, alarmed by an incursion of the Philistines, who encouraged by the disorders of his kingdom, had invaded the land. With something of his former courage he musters his forces, and putting himself at their head, pitches upon the heights of Gilboa; but when he sees the host of the Philistines arrayed against him, his spirit fails him; a presentiment of his fate paralyses him with fear, and nerveless, powerless, perplexed in the extreme, his heart *greatly trembles.* In his confusion^{1 Sam. xxviii. 5.} and distress he bethinks himself of God, and ventures to enquire of the Lord. He bids therefore the

High Priest consult the Urim and the Thummim ; but the oracle is dumb. Disappointed in the Priest he repairs to the prophets ; but the prophets have no message for him. The appointed channels of divine communication being thus closed against him, in the forlornness of his soul he casts his last hope upon a dream ; but the night is all visionless to him. The heavens are as brass above him. In vain does he enquire of the Lord : *the Lord answers him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets !*

Here then is an awful change. Here is a man, whom God Himself had chosen and anointed to be king over his people ; whom He had specially endued with his Spirit, and honoured with signal manifestations of his favour : and now that he is reduced to the last exigency of distress, and in his trouble seeks direction from above, God answers him not, but leaves him to himself, to his weakness, his wretchedness, his terrors, his despair. God, the all-merciful and gracious, whose own spontaneous promise it is, *call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee*—He does this ! But is the change then in Him ? Is He *a man, that He should lie*, or *a son of man that He should repent* ? Is there instability or fickleness in Him ? Surely not ! His conduct is regulated upon principles immutable as his own essence. He is still the same merciful and gracious being as before ; still the hearer and answerer of

Psalm l. 15.

Num. xxiii. 19.

prayer ; still the refuge and strength of all that put their trust in Him. To David, an exile at this very period in the land of the Philistines, his ear is freely open : to him his inspirations are unreluctantly vouchsafed, and for him He appears in goodness and power, and works out a marvellous deliverance. No : the change is not in God : and it is precisely because He changes not ; because He is true to Himself ; to his principles, his purposes, his threatenings, his promises, that when, in his distress, Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not.

And of this Saul himself was well aware. On a former occasion we are told that he *asked counsel of God, and God answered him not that day*. And how 1 Sam. xiv. 37. did he interpret the silence of the oracle ? *Draw ye near*, said he, *draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people, and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day*. He immediately inferred that the fault was verse 38. in themselves ; that somewhere or other there was sin : and he therefore at once convoked the people, that the sinner might be detected, and the obstacle to divine intercourse removed. And now in his alarm and agitation he enquires again of the Lord : he, who had despised his prophets, and slaughtered his priests, and in the pride and stubbornness of his heart had gone his own extravagant and reckless course :—he, with all these unrepented enormities upon his soul, and with his heart still bent upon evil

—he presumes to ask counsel of the Lord! Could he wonder that the Lord answered him not? No: he knew that it was the iniquity in his heart that closed the heavens against him; and he betrayed at once his own hopelessness of deliverance, and the depth of degeneracy into which he had sunk, by plunging still more madly into wickedness, and instead of humbling himself before God in sorrow and repentance, going desperately forth, and taking counsel of the devil.

Now, avoiding all that is obscure or merely curious in the history, let us confine our attention to the practical aspect of the subject, and endeavour to extract some of the instruction with which it is fraught.

Dreadful as the case may be, it is not without its parallels and approximations. In the church, even as in the world,—however it is to be explained or accounted for,—it is, unhappily, far from uncommon, for individuals eminently distinguished and universally honoured; men, ay, and women too, who seem to have the truth of God in their hearts, and the fear of God before their eyes, and a zeal for God in their lives, to exhibit this shocking deterioration of character, and, like Saul, to lapse and sink into the lowest depths of moral wretchedness and ruin. Neither, is it an uncommon thing for them, when thus degenerated and reduced, and involved in the consequences of their sins, to bethink them-

selves, like Saul, of the God whom they have forsaken, and like Saul too, to enquire of Him in their trouble: to enquire of Him with just the same dispositions, and therefore, with just the same result. Not from any abhorrence of evil, nor from the anguish of conscious guilt, but simply from the pressure of external distress; without renouncing a single sin; with a heart, indeed, still meditating evil; with even, like Saul, an alternative purpose, if God answers them not, to seek deliverance from some Satanic resource: precisely in this spirit—such are the infatuating effects of sin!—will they presume to enquire of the Lord. Distress and calamity, indeed, whatever their cause, will at times urge the most thoughtless to prayer. Those who have lived in the most profligate disregard of God, will eagerly seek a refuge in Him, when no other is discernible. Those who have never prayed before will passionately implore his succour, when other aid seems impossible or unavailing. But prayers and entreaties thus extorted—in what respect do they differ from the presumptuous enquiries of the guilty, panic-stricken monarch in the text? Oh! to enquire of the Lord, and in the hour of our need to obtain help and deliverance from Him, something other is necessary than the alarms and agitations of a soul thus hurried and distracted. Not only are they not repentance, not sorrow, not shame, not those dispositions which He demands, but they are

compatible with the very utmost obduracy of heart, the most determined disaffection for his service. There is in them no tincture of faith, or hope, or filial feeling. Their very wildness and forlornness indeed must ensure their repulse. They can only miserably react upon the misery which prompted them, exasperating it to frenzy, or deepening it into despair.

But we may look at the case in its application to other states of mind or forms of character, not exactly parallels, but approximations to the case before us.

There are those, for instance, who at times are heard to complain of "the hidings of God's face." They are not as they were *in months past, when his candle shined upon their head, and his secret was upon their tabernacle.* They have not that comfort in religion which they then had. Neither in reading the Scriptures, nor in public worship, nor in private devotion, do they enjoy anything like the happiness and benefit which they once experienced. The warm and lively current of feeling that formerly animated them seems dried up. They fear almost that they are cast off and forsaken. Why it is they know not, but when they enquire of the Lord, He seems inaccessible, to all their approaches: the Lord answers them not. And not unfrequently they endeavour to derive consolation from the thought that this is trial; that God is thus hiding Himself from

them in order to try their faith and patience ; and that therefore they must meekly submit, waiting his pleasure, and depending upon his faithfulness, till in his own good time, He shall lift upon them the light of his countenance in all the brightness and comfort of his former manifestations.—And so the change is not in themselves, but in God ! It is not they that are faulty, but He that hideth Himself ! But is it so, indeed ? And is there then caprice in Him ? What, does He willingly afflict ? Does He chastise for the mere pleasure of chastisement ? *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.* Does any earthly parent withdraw his countenance from a loving and dutiful child, merely that he may try his child's temper and disposition ? So long as the child is obedient and anxious to please, does not his parent delight in ministering to his cheerfulness and encouraging him with his smiles ? *If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things unto them that ask Him ?* Be assured, Brethren, that when our enjoyment of religion abates, it is because we have less of religion to enjoy. When our hearts grow cold in God's service, when the spirit of prayer and thanksgiving is languishing within us, it is because the world is regaining its old ascendancy over us. When we enquire of the Lord, and the Lord answers us not, it is because *we*

Psalm ciii. 13.

Matt. vii. 11.

are changed, not because He is not the same. Be assured that somewhere or other there is sin—pride, or self-security, or indolence, or self-indulgence—something or other in our tempers, or dispositions, or conduct, that interposes a cloud between us and the light of the divine countenance. Instead, therefore, of casting imputations upon his constancy and compassion, look into your own hearts, and *know and see wherein this sin is*. Instead of moping in melancholy, seek for strength in the generous exercise of Christian affection and the more earnest discharge of Christian duty. Look to the example of Christ, and like Him *be about your Father's business*, remembering that it is the *work* of righteousness that is peace, and that *if we ask and receive not, it is because we ask amiss*.

Luke ii. 49.

Isa. xxxii. 17.

James iv. 3.

A similar remark applies to those who are constant in their attendance upon the ordinances of religion, without however receiving from them any sensible benefit. They attend the public services of the sanctuary, they apparently mingle in its devotions; they listen to the preaching of the Gospel; they do this Sabbath after Sabbath, and year after year: they come thus ostensibly enquiring of the Lord, and yet the Lord answers them not. They are not merely consciously and evidently unbefitted and unblessed, but they become less and less anxious to realize a benefit and a blessing. But is the fault in God? Is it because they are beyond the

scope of his regards, because they are not included in the invitations of his Gospel and the purposes of his mercy? Is it because He withholds from them his grace, and denies them the genial influences of his Spirit? The seed of the Word is sown, and the seed is all the same, living seed, sown too by *the Son of Man*. Is it chargeable upon God, is it Matt. xiii. 37. from his want of watchfulness and care, that *the wicked one* cometh, and taketh it out of the heart? The seed is sown, and immediately it springs up. Is it chargeable upon God, is it because He withdraws the gracious influences under which it thus germinated, that it endures but *for a while*, and that those who had gladly received it, in time of temptation fall away? Or is it chargeable upon God, is it because He is sparing of his grace, that *the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful?* Mark iv. 19.

The same may be said with respect to the reading and study of the Scriptures. One man will open the Bible, and read chapter after chapter, and discover in it materials only for critical objection, or blasphemous wit. Another man, impressed with the majesty and force of divine truth, will prostrate himself before it, and adoringly acknowledge it as *the power of God unto salvation*. The Lord answers Rom. i. 16. the one; the other He answers not. But to what are we to attribute the difference? Is it chargeable

upon God, is it because of the arbitrary and partial distribution of divine grace, that the one man is a blasphemer while the other is a believer? Or is it not that the one, having, like Ezekiel's enquirers, *set up his idols in his heart, and the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, is answered according to the multitude of his idols*, while the other, in simplicity of heart, and an honest anxiety after the truth, enquires of the Lord, and is answered, therefore, according to the spirit in which He comes? *What is truth?* demanded Pilate of our Lord, and the Lord answered him not: why? Why, because the scornful sceptic neither desired an answer nor waited to receive one. And thus it ever is and must be. *A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not: but the meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach his way.* Consult *the lively oracles* in a spirit of pride, or captiousness, or levity, and what wonder if they be mute? Enquire of the Lord in a listless, indifferent, irreverent, undevout mood, and what wonder if from such enquirers He turn away his face, and hide Himself in impenetrable gloom?

Ez. xiv. 4.

John xviii. 88.

Prov. xiv. 6.

Ps. xxv. 9.

Acts vii. 88.

So likewise with respect to prayer. Some there are who, from early training and the force of habit, maintain regularly the practice of prayer. Morning and evening they go upon their knees, and would feel uncomfortable in the omission of the duty. Yet notwithstanding, they make no progress in the divine life, nor do they know what it is to have *fellowship*

with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ. The 1 John, i. 8.
 Lord answers them not. And why? Why, not
 because his ear is *heavy that it cannot hear*; for the Is. lix. 1.
eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are
open unto their cry. Not because He willeth not Ps. xxxiv. 15.
 their salvation, for *He would have all men to be saved*
and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Not because 1 Tim. ii. 4.
 He is stinting of his grace; for the same Lord over all
 is rich unto all that call upon Him: and as the heavens Rom. x. 12.
 are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them Ps. ciii. 11.
 that fear Him. No; it is not for any reasons such
 as these; but because *the Lord seeth not as man seeth*, 1 Sam. xvi. 7.
 but *looketh on the heart*; because He *desireth truth in*
the inward parts, and is not to be mocked with words, Ps. i. 6.
 and forms, and hollow semblances of devotion; be-
 cause *God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must*
worship Him in spirit and in truth; because the sacri- John iv. 24.
 fice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, and
 if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear Prov. xv. 8.
 me. Ps. lxxvi. 18.

Oh! to enquire of Him, to obtain an answer from
 Him, we must *wash our hands in innocency, and so must* Ps. xxvi. 6.
we compass his altar. All in vain do we ask Him to
 put away our sins, unless in contrition and repent-
 ance we have renounced them ourselves. All in
 vain shall we seek his direction and guidance, unless
 we be willing to be led by his Spirit. All in vain
 shall we hope to have Him for our friend, unless we
 yield up ourselves absolutely to his will, and *with*

Acts xi. 23. *purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord.* It is not enough to mortify some unholy habits and affections if still we cherish others. A roseleaf held close to the eye will hide from our view the whole universe around ; and a single sinful affection unresisted, unrenounced, is sufficient to deprive us for ever of all the consolations of God.

verse 15. *I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war upon me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams !* A cry more utterly forlorn than this of Israel's apostate and disconsolate King, anguish surely never wrung from human heart. Not defrauded Esau's *great and*
Gen. xxvii. 34. *exceeding bitter cry ;* nor the cry of the fugitive pro-
Jonah ii. 2. *phet out of the belly of hell ;* nor the self-damnatory cry of the traitor, *I have sinned in that I have betrayed*
Matt. xxvii. 4. *the innocent blood !* nor even the cry of the lost worldling tormented in that flame, was toned with
Luke xvi. 24. deeper woe. Alas, for the soul that God abandons !
 Think of it, oh ! think of it, all ye of whom God hath for so long been enquiring in vain, but to whom, though you have hitherto repulsed his importunities, He is still graciously addressing them—
Jer. v. 31. think of it ! *What will ye do in the end thereof ?* Think of being summoned hence by death, and immediately after death, amid the tremendous realities of the eternal world, awaking to the overwhelming perception, that you had all your life long been in contact with the Holy Spirit of God, the

kindest and mightiest Being in the universe, and that, instead of being the better for it, you had become the worse; instead of being made *partakers of the divine nature*, and changed into the divine image, you had only been assimilating to the depravities of hell; that *the Gospel of the grace of God*, which had been to others, and might have been to you, *a savour of life unto life*, had been, on the contrary, and this simply through your own suicidal perversity, *a savour of death unto death*, aggravating your guilt, and deepening your condemnation!

Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart!

Heb. iii. 7.



THE AMBITIOUS PETITIONERS.

MARK X. 35—38.

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came unto Him, saying, Master, we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They say unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.”

WE are not to suppose that in thus speaking of their Master in his glory, these disciples intended any reference to the spiritualities of the heavenly world, and the glory in which he there sits enthroned as *head over all things to the church*; for of these things they appear not to have had the slightest conception. These things they were not yet in a condition to understand. Their notions and expectations of what Jesus was to be and do, were all of a worldly and secular character; and the glory they were anticipating for Him was merely the pomp and circumstance of an earthly monarchy. They were expecting Him to restore the ancient kingdom of Israel: to rescue their country from the

Roman yoke, and reinstate her in her old rank in the scale of nations. Poor and despised as Jesus was, they firmly believed that to this He was destined ; that for this He was so marvellously endowed ; that somehow or other all his labours and sorrows were to issue in this result : and that, when He had happily accomplished this, He would recompense their fidelity by promoting them to the honours and dignities of his kingdom.

Such, unquestionably, was the view which the disciples generally took of their Master's ministry. With these hopes they flattered and consoled themselves under reproach and persecution : and cherishing, as they fondly did, these gross and venal expectations, it was only natural that their ambition should be strongly excited, and that they should display the genuine temper and spirit of the world, in the selfishness with which they severally aspired to superiority of station and emolument. It was under the influence of these views, in that spirit of cupidity which they were so calculated to inflame, that James and John presented themselves to our Lord on the occasion to which the text refers. Eager to anticipate their fellow disciples, and by priority of application to secure for themselves that pre-eminence for which all were thirsting : presuming also, as seems probable, upon the favour by which our Lord had sometimes distinguished them, they come to Him and present Him with this extra-

ordinary request, *Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory !* Grant that, when thou shalt have reestablished the throne of David, thy choicest favours may be bestowed on us, and that we may be appointed the chief ministers in thy kingdom !

Matt. xx. 20. St. Matthew, indeed, whose narrative of this incident is somewhat more circumstantial and minute, represents the request as preferred by *the mother* of James and John. But it amounts to the same thing. They were with her when she made it, affirming and seconding her application by their presence ; and from the indignation of the other disciples against the two brethren, and the pointed manner in which our Lord addressed his answer to them, distinctively from their mother ; it is evident that she was acting under their instigation, and that the petition was in the strictest sense their own.

The circumstance, however, of their employing their mother's mediation, is worthy of notice, from the discovery which it makes of the real state and posture of their minds. For it shews us, that, however they might reckon on their Master's favour, they had no confidence at all in the success of their suit ; that their petition, indeed, so far from being an act of faith, was simply an experiment of presumption ; that there was something in it which they themselves felt to be wrong, and of which in reality they were ashamed. Unless, indeed, they

had suspected its impropriety, why should they have hesitated themselves to present it? Assuredly He had never afforded them any reason for distrusting his generosity; on the contrary, everything in his whole conduct, especially to them, conspired to encourage their approaches. Why, then, should they have resorted to their mother's intercession, but from a certain feeling of shame; a presentiment of refusal and rebuke; misgivings that could have arisen from nothing less than a distrust of the legitimacy of their desires, if not, indeed, a consciousness of their positive criminality.

The least reflection must have convinced them how directly their ambitious impulses were opposed to the lowliness and self-denial which our Lord so repeatedly inculcated, and so constantly exemplified; and hence, doubtless, it was, that they had recourse to their mother, putting her forward as the organ of their wishes, and hoping to gain, through her influence, what they felt, or at least feared, would be denied to their own application. But surely, if the request itself was wrong, the expedient they resorted to was even more reprehensible; for what was it but just an insidious attempt to practice upon our Lord's sensibilities? What was it but attributing to Him a weakness which has the character of corruption? Upon what did it proceed, but upon the most unworthy supposition that He might possibly be induced to act upon a principle of mere

favouritism and partiality, and simply from the regard which He bore to their mother, to sanction desires which, uninfluenced, He would disapprove, and to gratify a cupidity for which their own consciences condemned them?

This, however, is not all; for just observe the peculiar manner, the caution and wiliness, with which they advanced their suit; not honestly and frankly stating it at once, but craftily endeavouring to compass their end by ensnaring Him in the meshes of a general and unconditional promise. *The come unto Him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire;* and it is not until they are baffled by the directness of our Lord's demand, *What would ye that I should do for you?*—that they venture to particularize it. An artifice as puerile as it was presumptuous! As if they could circumvent by their policy, however wily and astute, Him who *knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.* But so obscure and inadequate were their apprehensions both of his person and his perfections, that they could deliberately resort to such an artifice!

John ii. 24.

In various ways the incident is very instructive. It teaches us some things about the disciples, and some about our Saviour, and some that more immediately concern ourselves, and our own spiritual character and progress.

In the first place, with reference to *the disciples*—it shews us, as we have just remarked, how defective were the views which at this period they entertained, not only respecting the peculiar object of our Lord's ministry, but also with respect to his real nature and his divine dignity. And this it is important to observe, because one of the commonest errors into which the readers of Scripture fall, is to confound what the Apostles were, as they appear to us in the Gospels, with what they afterwards became, as they appear to us in the Acts and the Epistles; and thus to accredit them with a degree of intelligence and faith which they were far, very far, from possessing. Because, for instance: they acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God, they are often represented as having the same conviction of his Deity while He was yet with them upon earth, as they had after He had ascended into heaven, and the Spirit had been poured out upon them; whereas, if you will only carefully read the Gospels, nothing will appear to you more evident than the confusion and perplexity of their minds about Him. That He was indeed the Messiah, and, in some sense or other, the Son of God, they were fully persuaded; but in what particular sense to understand that appellation, they were totally at a loss to define. That his power, his wisdom, his goodness, were absolutely super-human and celestial, they deeply felt. At times, too, under the strong excitement of their wonder,

the truth seems to have flashed suddenly upon them; and then they would fall down and worship Him: but it was only a flash of momentary apprehension, and, as the feeling subsided, their perplexity returned. Thus it was during the whole of their intercourse with Him; and if you will only consider it, you will, we think, be of opinion, that intercourse so close and familiar as that to which He admitted them would have been impossible, had their knowledge of Him been clearer and more precise. Had they distinctly recognised the divinity of his person, had they felt as they afterwards knew that it was really and truly *God manifest in the flesh* that stood

1 Tim. iii. 16. before them, and that He discerned every thought and feeling that stirred within their breasts, they would have been totally unable to endure the contact with his perfections. They would have shrunk from the terrors of his very condescension. They would have continually trembled even under the benignity of his eye. Their feeling would have been like that with which Peter was overpowered, when, astonished by the miraculous draught of fishes into a momentary glimpse of the prodigious truth, he exclaimed, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!* Labouring, however, as they did,

Luke v. 8. under continual embarrassment from the effect of his human presence on their minds, they were enabled to associate with Him upon much the same footing as pupils with a kind and condescending

master; a certain profound reverence for his unapproachable excellences mingling with all their feelings, and restraining them from undue familiarity, without, however, rising into that awe which would have rendered his presence unsupportable.

All this is clearly discernible in the incident before us; an incident that could never have occurred, had they possessed just apprehensions of the divine nature and dignity of their Lord and Master. But neither could it have occurred had their *piety* been of that high order which we are apt to suppose it, but which is totally incompatible with that selfishness and cupidity, that eager thirst after superiority of place in his imaginary kingdom, with which they were all panting. For what was this but the genuine essence of worldliness? What but a temper in direct antagonism with that denial of self which is the very first requirement of the Gospel, the foundation of the Christian character, the soil in which all the Christian virtues grow? And therefore it was that our Lord so solemnly admonished them, *Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted—converted, that is from the worldliness of spirit by which you are at present characterized—and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Views and feelings such as those by which you are at present actuated, will totally incapacitate you for the reception of my Gospel, and for ever exclude you from my kingdom.—While, indeed, their hearts Matt. xviii. 8.

were set upon worldly honour and advancement, their love for anything higher and better must have been lamentably defective. Ambition in them would be just what it is in other men—an element of bitterness poisoning all their feelings: and such, indeed, was its actual operation. It was a source of constant jealousy and bickering and strife, which, but for the authority and solicitude with which our Lord on all occasions interfered to repress them, would inevitably have sundered them from each other, and dissolved their society. Even their attachment to Jesus himself—sincere though it unquestionably was from the irresistible charm of his goodness and love,—was nevertheless, contaminated by it with sordid and mercenary motives which, uncorrected, would infallibly have weaned them from Him. They flattered themselves, indeed, that they had forsaken all and followed Him; but the eager enquiry with which Peter enforced his boastful declaration, *What shall we have therefore?* plainly discovered how empty was the vaunt, and how little they knew what manner of spirit they were of. Followed Him! Yes, literally they followed Him. They gave Him their personal attendance in his journeyings from place to place: but how little, notwithstanding all his care, all his instructions, all his example, how little had they learned of Him? How little of his temper and spirit, his meekness and lowliness, his self-denial, his beneficence, his

mercy! What! Were they following Him then, when, seeing a man casting out devils in his name, they jealously and indignantly forbade him, as a presumptuous intruder into their peculiar province? Luke ix. 49. Were they following Him then, when they wished to call down fire from heaven, for the destruction of the unfriendly Samaritans? These, however, were only characteristic outbreaks, manifestations pure Luke ix. 54. and simple of that same worldliness of heart and mind, which prompted the petition in the text. It was not until the severest disappointment had crushed all their fondest hopes, and dispossessed them of those low and carnal ideas of Christ's kingdom with which they had been intoxicated; not until they found that his kingdom was not of this world: not a monarchy of outward state, but a spiritual kingdom, the reign of truth and righteousness and love: it was not until then that they really followed Him, and shewed themselves his disciples indeed. But oh, the change that came over them then! The different men they then became! Then, indeed, when they had received *not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is in God*, then they shone forth in a 1 Cor. ii. 12. new character, and shewed themselves men *of whom the world was not worthy*. But till then, we confess Heb. xi. 38. that we can see little to admire in them, little to imitate.

Now, when you revolve these considerations, does it not seem strange, that men, whose views of

Christ's kingdom were at this period so crude and erroneous, should, notwithstanding, have been set forth by our Lord to preach it? Why, obviously, they were unable to understand the meaning of their own language! Only think of it for a moment. There they were, going about from village to village, and city to city, declaring the kingdom of heaven to be at hand, and calling upon men to prepare for its reception, and yet, of the peculiar nature of that kingdom they were as completely ignorant as the very persons to whom they addressed the proclamation! All that they could intelligently state, was that the Messiah was come, that He had called them to be his followers, that they were eye-witnesses of the mighty works by which his Messiahship was attested, and that He had sent them forth to make his advent known: but as to what He was to *be*, and what He was to *do*, they were not only totally in the dark, but they were flagrantly in error! How are we to explain this? How but upon the presumption that they were thus sent forth by our Lord, for the purpose of testing and strengthening their faith in Him, and attaching them more firmly to Himself and his cause? He gave them power to work miracles in his name; to heal the sick, and cleanse the leper, and cast out devils; and every successive exercise of this power would be an additional demonstration to them of the reality of his Messiahship, and of the approaching fulfilment of

the prophecies relating to Him. And as to the substance and manner of their preaching—if they departed at all from the simple formula He had given them, if they expatiated at all upon the simple declaration that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, it must have been from some sudden supernatural prompture urging them to speak, and supplying them with the appropriate language, without however, disclosing to them the full meaning of their utterances: so that they would be much in the same condition as the prophets of old, *who testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow*, ignorant of the significance of their own predictions. All this may seem very strange and mysterious: but it shows us the signal propriety with which the Gospel dispensation is called *the kingdom of heaven*; it shews us how exclusively the power was God's, and how the men were merely instruments in the divine hand.

The incident before us is further instructive as illustrating to us—

The sort of life which our Lord was obliged to lead upon earth: the absolute loneliness of his soul. There He was, to his friends and to his enemies alike, a wonder and a mystery; a mighty enigma; *the light, indeed, of the world, but shining into darkness which comprehended it not*; no one entering into his purposes, no one understanding his objects, no one able to assist or encourage Him in the work which He

came to do! Like the Eternal Father, He dwelt *in*
 1 Tim. iv. 16. *light which no man could approach unto.* Yes, in more
 John iii. 13. senses than one, the Son of Man while on earth was
 also in heaven; his views, his feelings, his designs,
 so immeasurably above the level of man's thoughts
 and aspirations, that it was as if only the lower
 parts of Him were visible; as if He walked with
 his feet indeed on the earth, but his forehead in the
 skies. The work He came to accomplish was known
 to none, nor could He discover it to any; for no
 one could receive it, no one understand it, even
 when He declared it in language the most plain and
 literal. *Behold*, said He to his disciples, *we go up to*
Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets
concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished; for
He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be
mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and
they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the
third day He shall rise again. And they understood
 Luke xviii. 31. *none of these things: and this saying was hidden from*
them, neither knew they the things that were spoken. The
 cup that He was to drink of, the baptism that He
 was to be baptized with—these things were ever
 present to his mind; but there was none to cheer
 Him when straitened with the thought of them.
 He was not of the world; and them He had chosen
 out of the world to be with Him in his temptations;
 but they carried the world with them in their
 hearts, and worldly in thought and temper and

desire, instead of a solace and support, they were a constant trial to his patience and forbearance, which, had He been other than He was, would have been all unequal to the task. *Oh faithless and perverse generation*, He exclaimed on one occasion, *how long shall I be with you, and suffer you!* If Paul might Luke ix. 41. complain that He had *no man like-minded* with him- Philip ii. 20. self, no one who could sympathize with his anxieties and solitudes, how much more Jesus! Oh, the strength of purpose, the energy of resolution, the intensity of inextinguishable love, which must have been necessary to sustain Him through all this! With the mighty incommunicable secret of his mission ever pent up in his heart, imagine, if you can, the weight of unutterable feeling with which every sigh of his must have been laden; and what, when He retired to the mountain to pray, and unbosom Himself to Him who alone in all the universe could understand Him, what must have been the breathings of his soul!

But let us bring the subject nearer home, and look at it in its application more immediately to *ourselves*.

One thing then which it more especially teaches us, is, *the importance of clear Scriptural views of the true nature of Christ's kingdom upon earth.*

Low and carnal conceptions of it will necessary have the same operation in us as they had in the disciples. They will prevent us, just as they

prevented them, from receiving the Gospel in its spirituality and power; while, at the same time, they will generate low and carnal affections, precisely in harmony with their own, and directly, therefore at variance with all those principles, and tempers, and dispositions, which it is the great object of the Gospel to promote. As long as the disciples were looking for the establishment of a worldly monarchy, their minds were imperviously closed against all the grand peculiarities of the Gospel. In vain did our Lord apprize them of his approaching sufferings and death; in vain did He tell them that *the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*; in vain did He tell them that He was *the way, the truth, and the life*, and that no man could come unto the Father but by Him; they understood Him not; they could not understand Him; for all his sayings they were endeavouring to interpret by this one cherished idea—that He was to be a King, and literally to re-establish the throne of David. Everything which they could not reconcile with this was hidden from them; while everything which they could, was perverted into a delusive congruity with this pernicious fallacy. Such was its *intellectual* operation: while its *moral* effect was, as we have seen, to foster cupidity, and ambition, and jealousy, and discord, and strife; an intolerance of spirit that saw only an enemy where it ought to have acknow-

Matt. xx. 28.

John xiv. 6.

ledged a friend, and a merciless ferocity of temper, that would have commanded lightning from heaven for the gratification of its vengeance. And just so was it in after times, when they were called away from their inspired ministry in the Church to receive the reward of their labours. The error with which they had been infatuated was then revived in another form: and along with it came, as its inseparable attendants, the numberless evils of which it is the parent. The idea gradually arose in the Church that the kingdom of Christ, instead of being the reign of Divine Truth in the heart of man, *bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*, and ^{2 Cor. x. 5.} manifesting itself in the exhibition of that *love which is the fulfilling of the law*, was an outward and ^{Rom. xiii. 10.} visible polity, a great and powerful corporation, a splendid hierarchy, to which all men were to do homage, and into which the kings and princes of the earth were reverentially to bring their treasures, as obedient subjects and children of the Church. Under the influence of these low and sordid views, by which the kingdom of Christ was identified with the external grandeur of the church, the love of the truth was gradually superseded by the lust of ecclesiastical power and authority. Not the salvation of souls, not the spread of the Gospel, not the multiplication of Christ's spiritual subjects, but the exaltation of the Church visible, the advancement of its wealth and power and greatness—this became

the grand object of anxiety, and to this every other consideration was subordinated. Naturally therefore and necessarily, as the love of the truth declined, the church lost its purity. Naturally and necessarily, as the lust of power became predominant, it corrupted the truth into the instrument of its own ambition—debasing it down to the tastes and inclinations of the multitude, to whom the severe spiritualities of the Gospel were only irksome and repulsive, and who must, therefore, be allured into the Church by a religion better adapted to the pride and cupidity, the indolence and sensuality of human nature. Thus it was that the superstitions of heathenism were gradually incorporated with Christianity; for when the love of the truth was lost, there was nothing to resist their introduction. Thus it was that the sacrament passed into a sacrifice, and the minister rose into the priest, and the priest swelled into a potentate, until at length *the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition* was revealed in all his gigantic proportions, and the Church, from being the faithful witness and keeper of the truth, *the light of the world, the salt of the earth*, was converted into a nursery of superstition, a hot-bed of falsehood and imposture, a mighty engine of priestly domination and Satanic tyranny.

Matt. v. 13 14.

And as it was thus that the anti-christian church of Rome attained its disastrous ascendancy, so in this consists still, in great measure, the principle of

its strength, and the power of its fascinations. By this it is that so many are still being entangled by its wiles, and seduced into its communion; by thus confounding the inward and spiritual with the outward and visible; by identifying the power of the truth with the prevalence of a certain form of Church polity; in short, by representing the kingdom of Christ as a kingdom of this world—a poisonous fallacy, but one to which our sensuous nature and our carnal mind, ever longing for that which is outward and palpable, strongly incline us; and which, therefore, the father of lies is ever busy to employ, as a powerful instrument of achieving his conquests and spreading his delusions. Once, indeed, lose sight of the great truth that *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*; that it is not a visible thing, Rom. xiv. 17. a thing of pomp and show, of form and ceremony, but that its seat is in the heart, and that its existence is to be ascertained only by its effects; and that these effects are nothing other than the virtues and graces of the spiritual man—the meekness and humility, the purity and holiness, the justice and the mercy of which Christ Himself was the great exemplar; and that by whomsoever and by whatsoever these virtues are promoted, in that proportion Christ's kingdom is advanced: once lose sight of this, and we are half way on to Rome already; the rest may without difficulty be accomplished, and Satan lead us captive at his will.

Look once more at the subject as illustrating *the true spirit in which prayer should be offered.*

Matt. xxi. 22.

It was a large and encouraging promise which our Lord made to his disciples, and through them to all who should call upon His Name, that *all things whatsoever they should ask in prayer, believing, they should receive.* Mark, however, the condition upon which the promise is suspended—all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive. Our petitions, to be accepted, must be offered in faith; in the perfect assurance that we shall be heard and answered. But, obviously, this assurance is compatible only with such desires as we know and feel we may legitimately cherish. If there be any misgiving upon this point, there can be none of that confidence which is essential to prayer, and to which alone the promise is vouchsafed. There may be boldness, rashness, great and criminal presumption, as in the case of the two disciples before us, but there is no faith. *This*, writes one of these very disciples, and perhaps with a secret reference to this incident in his earlier life,—*This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.* In order, then, that our desires may be offered up to God in prayer, they must be such as we know to be accordant to His will; such as, if gratified, would tend to the advance-

1 John v. 14.

ment of His glory, and of our own spiritual well being. For all such we may *come boldly to the throne* Heb. iv. 16. *of grace*, in full assurance of the welcome that awaits us there. Wisdom for direction, strength for duty, courage for perseverance, fortitude for suffering, patience for tribulation, *every good gift and every perfect gift*, everything necessary for the divine life, James i. 17. the development of our spiritual nature, and the accomplishment of the spiritual man—for all these things we may ask with a confidence as firm and unlimited as *that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*. Here there can be Heb. xi. 6. no inordinateness of desire, no excess of importunity, for with respect to all these things His language is, *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. Be it unto thee* Ps. lxxxi. 10. *as thou wilt*. But for all other things, the things Matt. xv. 23. *even* that address our carnal appetites, and that act so powerfully upon us all—wealth, ease, reputation, honour, influence,—desire them as we may, faith shrinks from association with them; and if for such things we should venture to pray, it could be only with the distrustfulness which the two disciples exhibited: a distrustfulness which at once anticipates and ensures a repulse. Think then:—Of all the thousand desires that daily move and agitate us, how many could we make the subject of prayer? How many of those which we most fondly cherish, and which are mainly influential in determining the conduct of our daily life—how many are precisely

of the same character as that which prompted the unhallowed petition in the text; extravagances of vanity or pride, of covetousness or ambition; desires which we should blush and tremble at the thought of shaping into prayer? Hence it is that so many never pray at all; because they have no desire for the things which God is willing to bestow, and which He encourages us to ask for; and because the things which they do desire, are things for which they dare not, cannot pray. Alas, that it should be so! That there should be any man in such a condition of mind as to feel that he has no desires which he can confidently make known unto God; none which are in harmony with God's own gracious will concerning him; none but such as he cannot but fear and believe it would be only consistent with the goodness of God to disappoint and counteract!

Acts. xv. 9.

Ps. xxxvii. 4.

With this consideration we leave the subject. May the spirit of God be with us all, *purifying our hearts by faith*, and raising all our feelings and purposes into harmony with His holy will, that thus, delighting ourselves in the Lord, He may give us the desires of our hearts.



THE PUBLICAN'S PRAYER.

LUKE xviii. 13.

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner!”

PRECISELY the same sentiment, only expressed in language more elaborately emphatic, has been repeatedly on our own lips this morning; but whether it has been uttered by us with anything like the fervency of feeling which breathed in the simpler language of the publican, is known only to Him to whom all hearts are open. Which of us, however, but must confess, that, from the simple force of habit alone, he has often given utterance to this familiar petition, without any consideration of its import, any thought of the Great Being whose mercy he was invoking in terms of such passionate entreaty? How often have the words rolled carelessly from our lips, an empty, heartless form, and instead of obtaining the mercy for which we seemed to sue, only aggravated the guilt we were professing to deplore! Is it not so, brethren? Has not this been

too often the case with us all? Who, then, as he thinks of this, but must stand self-convicted and self-condemned, and feel, even if he never felt it before, that now at least, he has abundant reason to smite upon his breast, and say, *God be merciful to me, a sinner!*

Here, however, was a man who felt what he said; and it may be well for us, therefore, to form a clear idea of the precise state of mind of which, in the case before us, it was the expression: to ascertain, first, in what sense he confessed himself a sinner; and, in the next place, what was the mercy for which he sued.

The language, indeed, may be dictated by various conditions of feeling. In some cases it may be the simple utterance of a base and craven fear; an abject dread of the *present* penalties of vice or crime. A man, for instance, has, by his nefarious practices brought himself to the brink of ruin, from which he discerns no possibility of escape by any efforts of his own. In the wildness of his alarm, he therefore casts himself on the divine compassion, and cries out for mercy, without, however, any hatred of the sins which have brought him to this extremity, or any other anxiety than just to be delivered from the distressing consequences of his wantonness and folly. Need we say that the heavens would be as brass to all such appeals?

Or the prayer may be wrung from the lips of a

man by the stress of a mortal illness, and the intolerable prospect of *the wrath to come*: and all Matt. iii. 7. his anxiety may be to be delivered from the punishment which his guilty soul forebodes and trembles at. We need scarcely say that with such selfish impenitence the prayer of the publican has nothing in common.

Another man may confess himself a sinner, and implore the divine mercy upon himself as a sinner, but only in reference to some particular act of wickedness—some recent criminality which distresses and alarms him, or some older transgression which starts up in his memory, and glares its reproaches upon him. Something has roused his slumbering conscience, and the old unforgotten iniquity comes out from its lurking place, and will not be put aside. But for this, this particular offence, whether recent or remote—but for this, he would have felt no guilt at all, nor any reason for apprehension, any impulse to such a prayer; but this, whatever it may be, disturbs his self-complacency, awakens his fears, and in a spasm of penitence, a spasm of shame, he cries, *God be merciful to me a sinner!*

Nor is there anything wrong in this so far as it goes. Certainly, a man whose conscience reproaches him with any recent criminality has urgent reason to implore the divine mercy. Nor certainly is there anything inconsistent in a man's being disturbed by

the recollection of his mis-doings in the past, however remote may be the period of transgression. To the Great Inhabitant of eternity *a thousand years are as one day*; and it is with Him that we have to do. God, it is true, may have forgiven them. In the language of Scripture, He may have ceased to *remember* them: but that is no reason why the man himself should forget them. That is no reason why they should not live in his memory, and operate as a constant motion to humiliation and self-abasement. No lapse of years however long ought to lessen in our apprehension the malignity of our offences in the sight of God. Memory in such cases, though a stern, is still a friendly monitor; and when it brings before our view the sins of the past, it is that we may humble ourselves afresh in repentance, and cast ourselves more absolutely upon the divine mercy in Christ Jesus.

Still, however, this does not come up to the feeling of the publican, who does not seem to have had in view any particular offence, which stood flagrantly and accusingly before his conscience; but who refers to something far deeper and more extensive than any number of particular offences, when he smites upon his breast and prays, *God be merciful to me a sinner!*

Nor, again is it enough to regard this language as the expression of *a mere desire* that God would be merciful to him: for such a desire may be felt and

expressed without any confidence in the divine mercy generally, or any hope or expectation of it at all. A man, under deep distress of conscience may smite upon his breast, and in the anguish of his heart utter the publican's cry; and the action and the language may be nothing better than just the action and the language of total despondency. The feeling may be, Oh, that God would be merciful to me! But to me, sinner as I am, He will not, He cannot! Were my guilt less heinous than it is, I might perhaps indulge some hope of forgiveness; but guilty as I feel myself, there can be no mercy for me!—That, certainly, was not the feeling with which the publican is represented as labouring: for to despair of the divine mercy is to exclude oneself from it; and he, we know, went down to his house *justified*.

LUKE xviii. 14.

No: the case of the publican seems to have been that of a man who did not refer to any particular enormities of which he had been guilty, but who was affected and engrossed with a pungent conviction of the power of evil within him; the wrongness of his heart, the strength and dominance of his self-will, his innate and habitual sinfulness; for which, not less than for the guilt which he has actually and voluntarily incurred, he felt that he could not sufficiently abase himself before God; and when he prayed, God be merciful to me a sinner, it was not the utterance of a bare desire for the divine

mercy, but the earnest expression of his faith and hope in it. He felt himself in the fullest and strongest sense of the word, a sinner. Without comparing himself with other men, than whom he might be better or might be worse, he knew the plague of his own heart. He was deeply conscious of that wretched alienation of heart from God, which is the secret source of all our transgressions, and which makes sinners of us all. Whatever his actual criminalities, or whatever it may have been that led him to look into himself—whether some recent iniquity of singular turpitude, or any other cause, still it was not so much these particular outward acts—though doubtless he deeply felt them—as the *root* of bitterness within him, from which they sprung, and of which they were the simple direct manifestations—it was this that absorbed him. He felt it intricately interwoven with every fibre of his being; entering into and pervading his entire life, and contaminating every thought, every feeling, every action. These particular outward offences—what indeed were they but just so many palpable projections of his own disordered nature; so many dark images of his own polluted self, between which and the infinite purity of Him who is all *light, and in whom is no darkness at all*, he felt there was the frightfullest opposition! Therefore it was that, abashed and dejected, and standing afar off, as if his very presence in the temple were a desecration

Heb. xii. 15.

John i. 5.

of its sanctity, he *would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast*—an involuntary action, and the more significant because involuntary—*smote upon his breast*, as if taking vengeance on that evil heart, which made him the sinner he confessed himself to be. So engrossed indeed was he with this feeling, that he could see no virtue in himself of any kind, nor anything which he could for a moment think of alleging in support of his prayer, or in palliation of his guilt. Publican as he was, and unjust and rapacious as he may have been, unless he were a very monster of wickedness, he must, like other men, have had his good and amiable qualities, and as many, perhaps, and as fair as the Pharisee with whom he is contrasted; but of none of them does he seem conscious; to not a single counterbalancing virtue does he lay claim; he speaks of himself simply and emphatically as a sinner, utterly vile, utterly impotent, utterly without hope except solely in the mercy of God, upon which therefore he casts himself—casts himself just as he is. *God be merciful to me, a sinner!*

And this, we say, must have been not merely the language of bare desire, but the earnest expression of his faith and hope, that God could and would be merciful to him, sinner as he was: that somehow or other God would be propitious and would accept him; that his confession of guilt and his supplication for mercy would be no offence to the divine perfec-

tion, however abominable he himself might be ; but that God could meet him in the very condition and character in which he stood before Him, and extend to his sinfulness and misery the very mercy of which he felt his need.

This was a great reach of faith. It was a thing which is not often to be seen in persons labouring, like this publican, under strong conviction. It is common enough, indeed, for the thoughtless and irreligious to flatter themselves with the notion that the divine mercy is infinite, and that when it shall become necessary to seek forgiveness, they may turn unto God, and confess, and be forgiven. But how often does it happen that, when the contemplated exigency arrives and presses alarmingly upon them, their views and feelings suffer terrible alteration ! How often, when conscience is at length awakened, is their presumption all turned into distrust ; and the feeling then is, that to them, sinners as they are, God will not, God cannot shew mercy ! and that they must wait till they become less unworthy, or till the feeling of their unworthiness shall abate, before ever they can venture to look up hopefully to Him. However ardently therefore they may wish for the divine mercy, they dare not ask for it. They may wish for it, but they have no faith to pray for it ; no confidence that God will hear their prayer. Their iniquities have taken such hold upon them that they are not able to look up. Here, therefore, was the

publican's faith, that he verily believed, sinner as he felt and confessed himself to be, that God would hear his prayer, and vouchsafe him the very mercy of which he stood in need.

And this, brethren, is a faith we must all of us possess. None of us, indeed, know what we are. Our sins fade out of our memory for a time, and it is but the more prominent parts of our lives that we can at any time bring up before our view. The field of our vision is very limited, and not one of a thousand of our actual offences can we remember and confess; so that the sense of our sinfulness, however oppressive, can never correspond with the actual amount of our guilt. But still we are not to be dismayed. Though the very best of us is worse than his worst conceptions of himself can represent him, yet is he not to distrust the readiness of the divine mercy. Unless we may suppose the worst, and yet hope the best, there is no hope for us at all! Under such reflections, how welcome the encouragement provided for us in the assurance that *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound!* How much our sins have abounded, how flagrant our offences, how foul their stain, we can never truly tell: but let them be more heinous than the liveliest imagination can paint them, our all-sufficient hope and consolation lies here—Grace, much more!

Rom. v. 20.

This then leads us to one or two observations on the nature of the mercy for which the publican prayed.

This cry for mercy—what was the meaning of it? Was it to some dark, indefinite fear of hell that he gave this plaintive utterance? Was it merely the deprecation of wrath? merely that his sins might be forgiven and his punishment remitted?—To be forgiven? Ay, doubtless he prayed for that; but had that been all, his prayer for mercy would have been only another manifestation of his evil self. It would have evinced, not his hatred of sin, but only his dread of suffering. It would have been only the cry of the slave shrinking from the lash; base, sordid, craven. No; this was not the burden of his prayer. It was more than mere forgiveness that he needed and that he sought. What he wanted was mercy that should exactly meet his poignant sense of sin; mercy to deliver him from that tyranny of evil passion and evil habit under which he vainly groaned and struggled; mercy to tear out of his heart that *root of bitterness* of which he was so painfully conscious, but which, strive as he would, he could not himself eradicate. He was a sinner—a wanderer from God; and he felt his estrangement, and yearned to be restored and brought back to God. He had a certain sense of goodness and righteousness and truth which would not let him rest in sin; but how to make himself good and true and righteous he knew not. He was at war with himself, and he wanted peace; and peace, he knew, was to be found only in a heart made right with God; and the

Heb. xii. 15.

mercy for which he sued was mercy that would do this for him ; mercy that would bring his mind and will into harmony with the mind and will of God. Let but this mercy be vouchsafed him, and he would not shrink even from punishment, if by punishment it might be obtained. Only set him free from the hateful tyranny of evil, only rid him of his sinful self, and welcome any process by which the deliverance might be effected ! Welcome reproach, scorn, poverty, pain, any form of suffering short of exclusion from the divine favour ! Anything, anything would be more tolerable than thus to groan beneath that bondage of evil, which nothing but the power of God could break !

This, and nothing less than this, was the mercy for which he prayed ; and to nothing less than this would forgiveness have been vouchsafed ; for nothing less than this would have been the feeling of a penitent and contrite heart. And prayer without penitence, what is it but fear, base, selfish, servile fear ; fear that grudges every service ? Penitence, real penitence, is of all things in the world the least selfish and the most generous. Its great anxiety is to make amends. It feels as if it could never do enough. Self in all its forms is willingly sacrificed by the repentant heart, which never can be satisfied while anything may be done that remains undone, to make compensation for injury or neglect. It is so among ourselves. We despise all professions of

repentance without endeavours after restitution, as mere sham and hypocrisy; and it is eminently so towards God, to whom our obligations are infinite. To serve and glorify Him by the surrender of the whole life and being to Him—this is the anxiety of a really penitent spirit. True penitence is gratitude, is love, is self-devotion; the devotion of the whole man to God, cheerfully and absolutely, without scruple or reserve. And this was the publican's feeling. And this, too, must be the feeling with which we supplicate the divine mercy, or our prayers will be utterly unavailing: the heavens will be deaf to our most piercing cries.

In conclusion :—Learn from the considerations with which we have been occupied, that the religion of man is the religion of a sinner. Only in this character can we have access unto the mercy seat. The publican knew this, though he did not know as we know the *grounds* on which, as sinners, we can come before God, and look hopefully for his grace and mercy to pardon and restore. He knew only that he might do so; that however severe the divine justice, however awful the divine law, God could, notwithstanding, be merciful to him. But we are instructed in the reason of the thing. The mystery of mercy has been revealed, and the way of salvation is made plain to us. We know that it was *while we were yet sinners*, and because we were sinners, that *Christ died for us*: that *Him hath God set forth to be a*

propitiation through faith in His blood.....that he might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus ; that He made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that Rom. iii. 26.
we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. We 2 Cor. v. 21.
 know that Christ came, *not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance :* that if we look upon ourselves Matt. ix. 13.
 as righteous we exclude ourselves from the scope of His mediation ; and that it is only as sinners, ruined in ourselves, and utterly impotent and helpless without Him, that He is of any value to us at all. All our religion is founded on this sense and confession of sin ; and without this we can have no religion worthy of the name. For as we are fallen creatures, and from the disorder and infirmity of our nature sin daily against God, unless we feel and confess both our sinfulness and our sins, it is impossible for us to have any religion that will be acceptable to Him.

We may learn also, and let us take both the warning and the encouragement which the consideration involves, that it is not sin that destroys, but impenitence ; indifference to our real character and condition. For sin there is an atonement in the propitiatory sacrifice of the Cross ; and for the sinner, however multiplied and aggravated his transgressions, there is mercy and salvation in Him *who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.* No man need despair, therefore, Heb. vii. 25. because he feels himself a sinner ; for it is to him

specifically as a sinner that the merciful invitations of the Gospel are addressed. It is only to the impenitent that there is no hope, no forgiveness. For the broken spirit there is a healing balm; but for the hardened and impenitent, there is none, and there can be none !



SECRET PRAYER.

MATT. vi. 6.

“ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet ; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

THE object which our Lord seems to have had in view throughout the whole of this sermon on the mount, was to purify the Law of moral duty embodied and condensed in the ten commandments, from the corruptions that had crept into it from Rabbinical tradition and Pharisaic hypocrisy ; and to publish it anew, in all its comprehensiveness and spirituality, as the divine standard of moral rectitude, and the great unalterable rule of the Christian life. He accordingly commences by pronouncing a blessing upon certain states of mind, certain forms and aspects of spiritual character—humility, meekness, religious contrition, purity of heart, and so on ; and then advances to the exposure of the corruptions—the hollow formality and the heartless hypocrisy

by which the profession of religion was so commonly disgraced.

In the passage with which the text is connected, He is addressing Himself to the subject of hypocrisy in prayer, and warning his disciples against everything like display and ostentation in the performance of this solemn and all important duty. *And when thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.* Anxious only for a little vulgar popularity, they parade their piety before the public eye, and lay themselves out for admiration. And, *verily I say unto you, they have their reward.* Such as it is they have it, in an empty reputation for superior sanctity. But by no notion of this kind are my disciples to be actuated. This vain-glorious ostentation is not for them. *Thou, when thou prayest,* instead of courting observation, seclude thyself from notice. *Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door,* so as to be retired from every eye but the eye of the All-seeing, *pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* Of course our Lord is not to be understood as interdicting his disciples from the observance of public worship, or from acts of social prayer ; but only as referring to acts of private devotion, and the sincerity of heart which is necessary to their acceptableness. His meaning therefore is simply this. Carefully avoid

everything that savours of ostentation in your devotional exercises, and let your private prayers be strictly private. The secret chamber is the place for them, or some retirement where none can see you, but where you may be alone with God, and pour out your heart unreservedly to Him who requireth *truth in the inward parts*, and who is not to be mocked by any pretences, however shewy and imposing. *Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet.* Ps. li. 6.

A man, it is true, can pray anywhere, and be alone anywhere—in the streets, in the market place, in the busiest thoroughfare, in the densest crowd: there, retired within the secret chamber of his own heart, and unobserved as in the seclusion of his closet, he may lift up his soul unto God. But though a man may thus abstract himself from things around him, no one seriously intent upon engaging in private devotion, would prefer such scenes as more favourable to his purpose than solitude. No one really in earnest, but would rather retire, like Nathanael, as much as possible from all notice and disturbance, that in perfect freedom he might hold communion with *the Father of Spirits*. That this was our Lord's own habit we know. True, He had no closet of his own to which He could retire: for *the Son of Man had not where to lay his head*; but the garden, the mountain, the desert place, some scene of stillness remote from public haunt and observation Heb. xii. 9.
Matt. viii. 20.

—these He made his closet, and thither he withdrew for secret communion with his Father.

Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of his prayer.

In enjoining therefore this secrecy upon his disciples, He was only bidding them learn of Him, and follow his example.

Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet. The language evidently supposes that Christ's disciples will pray, and it as evidently also recognizes the power of prayer with God. The philosopher indeed may despise it. He may insist upon the absurdity of imagining that the utterance of our wants and wishes can have any possible influence upon the purposes and the determinations of the Divine mind, and may hold up the practice to the derision of the scientific, as a thing manifestly incompatible with the prescience of the Deity, and the established order of nature. But the irrepressible instincts of the human heart are a far stronger argument for the efficacy of prayer, than the philosopher's inability to reconcile it with the divine perfections is an argument against it. *My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God*, exclaims the Psalmist, giving fervid expression to the universal craving of humanity: *From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee when my heart is overwhelmed.* Yes, men in circumstances of peril or distress ever have prayed, and ever will pray, let the philosopher dogmatize as

Ps. lxxxiv. 2.

Ps. lxi. 2.

he will about the order of nature, and the invariableness of the laws according to which phenomena take place. But who told him that these laws are invariable? Where did he learn that? Where are the facts, and what the authority, that warrant him in making such an assertion? Not most assuredly his own personal experience, for the field of his observation is infinitely too confined; and not the recorded experience of others, for that he is unwilling to admit, except as it agrees with his own. How little indeed, with all his accumulated knowledge—how little is it that he knows. The very utmost that his boasted science enables him to assert, is that the phenomena of nature take place according to *general* laws; but that these general laws are also invariable, that the power which imposed the law is unable at pleasure to suspend it, is a dictum of the philosopher's own, utterly at variance with all analogy, and immeasurably more unphilosophical and presumptuous than the faith that believes *that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*. But let us leave the philosopher to his Heb. xi. 6. dark speculations and his dreary conclusions. Happy for us that we are not thus left comfortless! Happy for us, that the soul's instinctive impulses are so abundantly sanctioned by the testimony of God's holy word, which for nothing is more remarkable than for the encouragement it affords us *in all things, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to make*

Philip iv. 6.

known our requests unto God. Scarcely a page in the sacred volume but teems with prayers, and divine answers to prayer, and divine promises to prayer, presenting Him, the Incomprehensible, to our faith, as the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, and sustaining and signally illustrating the gracious injunction and assurance in the text.—To this, therefore, let us somewhat more particularly direct our attention.

Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet. The injunction is evidently based upon the very nature of religion itself, as an inward and personal thing, consisting in the state of the heart, the posture of the affections towards God.

Public worship is a collective act, and has a certain corporate character. We assemble and meet together in the house of God, not to offer Him our separate services, but our united adoration. The idea is that of a number of individuals combining together in one act, the individuality of each being merged in the unity of the whole; so that the worship is the devotion of the one undivided whole, the utterance of, as it were, one mind, and one mouth. The idea, therefore, of religion as a personal thing, the state of the individual man's own heart and mind in relation to God, is almost lost sight of in the corporate character of public worship: whereas it is brought distinctly before the mind in private devotion, when I come before God, not in association with others, but alone—an isolated

individual, to confess to Him my own particular sins, to lay open before Him my own particular wants, to seek from Him the renewal of my own heart, and to obtain the mercy and the grace required by my own personal and peculiar needs. The piety of others, the collective piety of the church, I cannot carry with me into the closet. No: I retire thither, myself alone, to seek a private audience with God. A solemn consideration this, and never to be lost sight of, that religion is a personal and exclusive thing; that the repentance of others, or the faith of others, can never supply the deficiencies of my own; but that it is according to what I myself in the sight of God am, that I stand accepted or rejected before Him. We may talk of the church, and glory in the church—and a blessed thing it is that God has a church in the world—but we must remember that the piety of the church can never become common property; nor has the church any works of supererogation, any treasury of superfluous holiness with which to cover the defects of its less worthy members. On the contrary, we have each one of us for himself to *work out our own salvation*, even as Phillip ii. 12. *we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*, who Rom. xiv. 12. *will give every man according as his work shall be.* Rev. xxii. 12.

Thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and pray to thy Father which is in secret. Whether from ignorance of our Lord's precept, or on account of the solemnizing associations and influences of an

ecclesiastical edifice devoted exclusively to divine worship, or from some superstitious imagination that prayer derives a certain sanctity from the sacredness of the place, and rises more surely and acceptably to the throne of mercy than when offered up within unconsecrated walls; or from whatever other feeling, many there are, whose sincerity it is impossible to doubt, to whom, however, the closet with all its secresy, seems less attractive than the open church with all its publicity, to which, therefore, rather than to the closet, they habitually resort, for solitary meditation and prayer. But why should the closet be without its own solemn associations? Why should not it also be a sacred place? What can consecrate a spot if the sense of the divine presence does not? And why may not the divine presence be realized in the closet as vividly as in the deepest shades of the sublimest temple? Wherever God is sincerely sought, is the throne of grace not there? Or can we anywhere draw nigh to Him, and He not draw nigh to us? *Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet*—why, if God be not there as really and as benignly as He is anywhere? Why, if in thy closet thou art not in His presence as really and as immediately, as if thou wert in heaven itself, bowing with the seraphim before the throne? What distance, indeed, can intervene between thyself and Him, who, while dwelling *in the high and holy place*, dwelleth also *with*

him who is of a contrite and humble spirit? What are Is. lvii. 15.
consecrated walls to Him who dwelleth not in temples
made with hands? Enter thou into thy closet, and Acts. xvii. 24.
however mean and bare it be, if thou feel after Him
thou shalt find Him. Pray to thy Father which is in Acts. xvii. 27.
secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward
thee openly.

Now if we revolve these considerations, several things relating to the discharge of the duty will become obvious and clear.

In the first place, they strikingly illustrate the deep solemnity of the thing. It is going away by one'sself to be alone with God. True, his eyes *are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*; but when Prov. xv. 8. we enter into our closet to present ourselves before Him, we are placing ourselves more immediately under his eye, and inviting his special attention. We shut out the world, we retire from the family, we seclude ourselves from all human observation, that we may more intimately realize his presence, and may become more peculiarly the objects of his notice. We are, as it were, singling ourselves out from all the world, that we may engage his exclusive regard. It is as if we were collecting all the rays of his omniscience into one focal point, and concentrating them upon our own individual hearts. Can there possibly be a more momentous consideration? Weighed, as it ought to be weighed, it is enough either to deter us for ever from the duty, or to bring

us to the discharge of it in a spirit the most profoundly reverential, the most intensely self-collected, the most transparently honest and sincere. Formality and levity in public worship is a criminality sufficiently heinous, but heartlessness and hypocrisy in the closet has surely a ten-fold guilt. Thus in secret to draw near to Him that seeth in secret, to draw nigh to Him with the lip while the heart is far from Him, is an impiety for which language has no name.

In the next place, as Religion is a personal thing, and private prayer is for the utterance of our own personal and peculiar wants and anxieties, so it ought evidently to be unrestrained and confidential, We shut to the door that we may be alone with God, and as near as possible to Him—for what, but that we may freely and fully pour out our hearts unto Him? that we may speak to Him of things which we cannot speak of in the hearing of any but Himself? that we may confess to him sins and faults, sins of commission and sins of omission, sins of thought and sins of feeling, which are known only to ourselves and to Him? that we may tell Him of bitternesses with which no stranger can intermeddle, and breathe anxieties into His ear which we cannot make public? In the church, or in the family, we can only pray in general terms. We can confess only sins which are common to all men, and implore that mercy and grace of which all alike stand in need. But each individual has his own

peculiar sins, his own peculiar faults and infirmities, and for these, therefore, he stands in need of peculiar mercy and appropriate grace. He has his own peculiar hardships, and trials, and temptations, and distresses; feelings which admit of no communion, and which defy all human sympathy; and he enters into his closet and shuts the door, that he may hold communion with Him who seeth in secret, and tell Him what he can confide to none besides. Obviously then, there ought to be no reserve, no concealment, in this close and confidential intercourse. Prayer in the merely general terms unavoidably employed in public or social worship, will be totally inadequate to the utterance of those deep and peculiar feelings which are reserved for secret communication with our heavenly Father. Neither will they find fit expression in any form of words another person can devise, however skillful and scriptural the composition. The heart will never be satisfied with such petitions as will suit thousands as well as itself. Its feelings will no more fit into another person's language, than the body will fit into another person's skin. What it deeply feels, it will endeavour distinctly to utter. If only for its own relief, it will endeavour to detail its wants, to confess its failings, to particularize its offences, to recount and dwell upon its mercies. Its sense of gratitude, its sense of guilt, its sense of need, if genuine and deep, not superficial or feigned, will be satisfied with

nothing less than this free and full, this minute and confidential communion.

Then, again, as this secret prayer is prayer addressed to our *Father*, it will be as childlike as it is confidential. It is not merely to an omniscient and almighty Being that we go : it is not some retired, mysterious Stranger to whose heart we are repairing : but it is to our *Father*, who is invisible and in secret it is true, but who is not less really our Father for that : our heavenly Father, but all the more loving and gracious for that—our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, Him *who spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all !* It is to Him that we confess ourselves ; it is into his ear that we utter our griefs ; it is into his heart that we empty our own ! And oh ! how affectionate, how childlike ought to be our petitions ! How simply will they be uttered, the more simply the more acceptably ! He requires no studied phrase, no rounded periods, no nicety or pomp of language, but only the utterance of the heart, the feeling of the heart, which will sometimes notwithstanding every effort be impossible to articulate, but which then—oh, blessed thought ! which then speaks for itself louder and clearer than an angel's tongue, and goes directly and at once, unuttered, into the heart of God.

And as it will be childlike, so it will be very humble and submissive. There will be nothing like presumption in our petitions, but only an implicit

deference to his wisdom and love. All spiritual good, indeed, we may boldly and without limitation ask for, in the perfect confidence that He is ever more willing to bless us than we are to be blest: but for other things we can only very humbly and submissively petition, as not knowing ourselves whether they be good for us or not. We shall leave all to Him, assured that in his fatherly kindness and wisdom, He will do for us not only that which is good, but that which is best, and that *all things* shall *work together for our good*, if only we love Him. Rom. viii. 28.

And thus it will be perfectly trustful. For we are praying not to an idol, to a god *that cannot save*, Is. xlv. 20. but to Him, the All wise, All gracious, All powerful, who knoweth our necessities before we ask, and needeth not therefore that we should tell Him of them; who indeed requires us to do so only for our own sake, that we may more feelingly realize our dependence upon Him, and be drawn into closer communion with Him, and know in our inmost heart that we are indeed his children, his sons and his daughters, and that He, the Lord Almighty, will be all the father to us. 2 Cor. vi. 18.

Pray thus to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. The effect of these your private and retired devotions shall be manifest to yourself and apparent to the world.

It shall be manifest to yourself in the increasing

harmony of your mind with the mind and will of God ; in the confidence with which you can approach Him ; in the promptitude and alacrity with which you engage in his service, and in your growth in faith, and hope, and love, and the love of every Christian grace and virtue.

PHIL. III. 20.

And it shall be apparent to the world in your manifest superiority to the world, to its vanities, its vices, its sensuality, its selfishness, and in the whole aspect and bearing of a man whose *conversation is in heaven*, and who walks with God.

1 PET. I. 12.

Higher however than this ; He shall reward you openly, not only here, by thus gradually conforming you to the image of his Son, but hereafter, *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*, when that image shall visibly perfected, in the assimilation of your entire nature to the glorified humanity of the Son of God.

Thus far we have been regarding secret prayer as a duty, whereas we ought, rather, to have insisted upon it as a privilege ; for privilege it surely is, than which none higher and sublimer can be conferred upon us until we are ushered into the world above, where prayer is lost in praise. A privilege it surely is, and unless valued as a privilege, will never be rightly discharged as a duty. Think, indeed, of being permitted this free access to God ; to whom, as our Almighty Friend and loving Father, we may at all times come and unbosom our anxieties, and tell Him all our troubles, under the infallible

assurance that He will not only answer but surpass our very largest desires! Alas, that such a privilege should ever be disparaged and disesteemed! But so it most awfully is. By the church of Rome it is even degraded into a *penance*, and as a penance it is imposed by the Confessor upon his penitents, and made the condition of the absolution with which he sends them comforted away!

And the Confessional too, about which we have heard so much—how little should we ever have heard of it, had but this high privilege been prized according to its value! From the disparagement or contempt of this indeed it is, that the Confessional is resorted to. Closet prayer, if not wholly neglected, is only a formal, heartless service. Prayers are said without praying. There is no emptying the heart into the heart of God; no whispering into his ear; no real confidential intercourse with Him, nothing of that filial *fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*, to which He so earnestly invites us, and which is to be realized only in secret, and so there is no peace; no consolatory sense of forgiveness; no feeling of reconciliation, no animating assurance of His gracious Fatherhood. Guilt is still on the conscience, and the heart is ill at ease; and so the crafty call of the priest is harkened to, and confession is in some sort made to him, and the heart is in some measure unburdened and relieved by this delusive substitution of man for God, because

¹ John 1. 8.

to the man they can talk with more openness and sincerity than to God, their heavenly Father!

Oh! had we but faith in God, in his promises and assurances, his mercy and loving-kindness in Christ Jesus; did we but believe Him to be the Father that He is, and with childlike trust lay hold of his proffered affection, what room would there be for the Confessional? What occasion for the Priest? What would there be left to tell the Priest when we had told all to God? Or what need for the Priest's absolution when we have received God's forgiveness? How indeed—with what unutterable intensity of loathing and abhorrence would he be avoided and shunned,—he, with his disgusting curiosity and his spurious absolutions!

Ephes. ii. 12.

Dan. v. 23.

Many there are also, by whom, though they are far from Roman Catholics, this great duty is shunned as irksome, or declined as unnecessary; for that it is a privilege the highest and most precious that God has vouchsafed to man, seems never to have occurred to them; and so they never pray at all! They are content to live without it, and so to live *without God in the world*: lying down at night and rising in the morning without any acknowledgment of his goodness, any sense of his fatherhood, any recognition of Him *in whose hand their breath is, and whose are all their ways*. The duty of prayer they never discharge: the privilege of prayer they never enjoy; the comfort of prayer they never experience!

Let none of us, Brethren, be guilty of thus esteeming the goodness and the grace which permit and invite our approaches to his throne, lest we discern our inestimable privilege when we can only deplore its irreparable loss. *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near !* Is. lv. 6.



DYING IN SIN.

JOHN viii. 24.

“ If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.”

AMONG the various peculiarities by which our Lord's conversations and discourses were characterised, not the least remarkable is the manner and frequency with which He speaks of Himself. Himself—his character, his authority, his work, his objects, his claims; Himself in some aspect or other, some relation or other—Himself is ever the chief topic of his discourse. And this is a peculiarity observable in Him alone. The prophets and inspired teachers of whom we read in the Old Testament, never gave themselves this prominence in their addresses to the people among whom they ministered. Messengers of heaven though they were, we never find them insisting upon their own dignity and importance. We never find them asserting their own personal claims to the veneration and homage of their hearers; nor ever speaking of

themselves except simply as servants of the Most High God. The same may be said of the apostles. Eminently distinguished as they were, gifted with miraculous power, and invested with divine authority, we never find them preaching themselves, or holding themselves forth to the faith and devotedness of their hearers. On the contrary, lest any should be disposed to render them an honour which was not their due, we find them emphatically asserting their own nothingness, and evincing the strongest anxiety to repress any disposition in others to give them an importance which they themselves shrunk from assuming. Their language was, *Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed !* Our 1 Cor. iii. v. Lord, however, not only spake as never man spake, but He also spake of Himself as never man spake. He was continually preaching Himself. In public and in private, to friend and to foe, in every variety of language and imagery, he was continually asserting and illustrating his own dignity and preeminence, his office and authority, and the necessity of cordially acknowledging Him to be what He thus proclaimed Himself. His ministry was in this, as in other respects, essentially distinguished from that of all who went before, and all who came after Him. The prophets speaking *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, preached Him that was to come. The 2 Pet. i. 21. apostles, under the influence of the same inspiration, preached Him that was come. Jesus preached

Himself, emphatically declaring *I am He*, and *if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins*.

And doubtless, though in all this there was nothing that savoured of vanity or ostentation, nothing that did not perfectly harmonize with the modesty and lowliness so conspicuous in his general deportment, yet it was one cause of his offensiveness to the Pharisees, and of the scorn and contempt with which they met his pretensions. Thus, in the chapter from which the text is taken, when our Lord declared Himself to be *the light of the world—I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*—they were provoked by what they regarded as merely self-laudatory language, and seized therefore upon the fact that He was preaching Himself, as a sufficient warrant for their rejecting Him—*Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true*. Our Lord's answer is remarkable from the determination with which He persists in the assertion of his authority and absoluteness. *Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true, for—*significantly alluding to his divine pre-existence—*I know whence I came, and whither I go*. He proceeds, however, to refer to the miracles which He wrought, alleging them as the direct testimony of the Father, decisively authenticating his highest pretensions. *The Father that sent me beareth witness of me.*, visibly attesting the truth of my declarations: and because, therefore, He hath sent

verse 12.

verse 18.

verse 14.

me, and I am what I declare myself, *not of this world* but *from above*, ye who reject me *shall die in your sins.* verse 23.
—*I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am not of this world, but from above—if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*

The passage has been the subject of much disputation, into which it would be only wasting your time to enter. We have given you what we apprehend to be its real impost, and shall now offer you a few observations on the event intimated in the words *Ye shall die in your sins*: an event which our Lord declares will be the inevitable result of unbelief in Him.

It is a topic, however, upon which we can speak only very feebly and imperfectly, inasmuch as we can form no adequate conception either of the malignity of sin, or of the nature of death. We know, indeed, generally, that sin must be a great evil, inasmuch as it is the cause of all other evils, and the parent of death itself: but we hear so much of it, and see so much of it, and retain so much of it in our own hearts, that we are far from entertaining any adequate views of its real malignity. From death, too, we all shrink as from something unspeakably formidable; but what it is to die we know not. What therefore it must be to die in sin—what these two things, separately so dreadful, must be in their combination, who shall tell us?

Is. xl. 28.

It may assist us, however, in some measure to enter into the significance of our Saviour's language, if we advert for a moment to what sin in itself is: that it is nothing other than hostility to God: hostility more or less direct and audacious to his supreme and sovereign sway. It is the creature setting up its will against the will of the Creator; repudiating his authority, renouncing his service, challenging his power. Now, for *the Everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth*, intent upon the well being of the creature, to lay his commands upon him, and to say, *Thou shalt not do this*, and for the creature to say, *I will*; for the Creator to say, *Thou shalt do this*, and for the creature to say *I will not*—why, surely, there is in this monstrous insurrection of absolute weakness against absolute power, a pride and a presumption, that should make the very heart within us tremble. It is true, that this may not be literally the language of our lips, but assuredly it is the language of our actions. Every act of disobedience to the divine law, however inadvertent, is opposition to Him, arising out of alienation from Him; but knowingly to transgress his law is to act precisely in this manner; to assume precisely this attitude of direct and audacious opposition to Him. And what terribly aggravates the evil is the *ingratitude* which this opposition involves. For it is not merely the creature meeting the commands of the Creator with

disregard or defiance, but a creature loaded with his benefits, and continually living upon his fatherly kindness! It is not only rebellion against Infinite Power, but also against Infinite Goodness, and beyond this it is impossible to go. Looking then at sin in this light, it seems to stand alone; to be altogether out of the reach and range of any other evil; so that there is nothing with which it can be compared, nothing by which it may be measured, nothing by which its enormity can be ascertained or illustrated. And this the apostle Paul seems profoundly to have felt, when, at a loss for language, and unable to compare sin with anything but itself, he resorts to that remarkable pleonasm, and speaks of *sin*, under the illustration of the commandment, becoming *exceeding sinful*.

Rom. vii. 18.

Now there are some forms of sin which at first sight so strongly excite our abhorrence, that we do not hesitate ourselves to apply to them language of the severest condemnation. We feel ourselves, indeed, totally at a loss to speak of them in terms befitting their enormity. But though it may be true that sin admits of degrees, and that some sins have a more aggravated criminality than others, yet the essential principle in all sin is the same. It is opposition to God. It is the creature in antagonism with the Creator. Whatever its specific form and distinction, or whatever its personal or social consequences—and in some cases they are unquestionably far more

pernicious than in others—it has in itself, under every form and in all circumstances, this character of monstrous presumption and detestable ingratitude: and it is only by looking at it in this light, that we can form any right apprehension of the essential turpitude of the thing itself, and of its necessary abominableness in the sight of God.

Confining ourselves then to this one simple and scriptural representation of sin, we may next observe that this opposition is reciprocal; and that to live in sin is not merely to be in a state of opposition to God, but to have Him in a state of opposition to us.

Ps. xxxiv. 16. *The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.* His opposition may not indeed be distinctly manifested at present, but it is not the less real on that account. God is against them that are against Him. He may indeed still hold Himself open to reconciliation. He may declare Himself still willing to receive into his favour and friendship all who penitently return and submit themselves to Him. He may even have devised means by which this reconciliation may be brought about, and in various ways may be continually urging the gracious offers of his mercy upon their acceptance. He may wait long in his reluctance to destroy, but notwithstanding all this, He is against them that are against Him. All indeed may seem to go well with them. They may have no distressing consciousness of guilt, no alarming apprehensions of *the wrath to come*; they may be untroubled in

their worldly circumstances and concerns ; they may prosper, and in their prosperity may spread themselves *like a green bay tree* ; but still He is against Ps. xxxvii. 35. them that are against Him. *God is angry with the* Ps. vii. 11. *wicked every day*, and all his attributes and perfections are arranged menacingly against them.

This then is surely a condition sufficiently awful : to be in a state of continual opposition to God, and to have God, *the great and terrible God*, in continual Neh. i. 5. opposition to us. But this it is to *live* in sin. Let us now then proceed to consider what it must be to *die* in our sins.

Now whatever else death may be ; whatever the nature of the change which at death we undergo, whatever the new condition of existence into which we then are launched—and of these things we can only form the vaguest conjectures—whatever, we say, death may be in other respects, it is certainly that which fixes the character of a man ; and which, in fixing his character, fixes also his condition in the spiritual and eternal world. Life is a state of constant change ; and no man morally any more than materially, “ continueth in one stay.” His principles of action, his habits of thought and feeling, his likings and dislikings, all, in short, in which character consists, are, under the various influences to which he is subject, constantly changing for the better or for the worse. Nothing in him is fixed here, but everything is in a state of mutation. And hence it is that the

divine forbearance towards us is exercised, that under the varying circumstances and influences of life, our moral susceptibilities may receive a new impression, and a change be effected in us for good. But all this ceases at death, the *great* change, and in no sense more emphatically so than in this, that it is the *last* change; the conclusion of the process, the change that for ever destroys the susceptibility of change: so that the character which a man has then, he will unalterably retain in every condition of being into which he may pass. As the tree falls so it lies. We must work while it is day; *the night cometh when no man can work. There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave.* There is no repentance there. The period of trial is at an end: the opportunity of amendment is gone: the influences of divine grace are withdrawn. The man's character has attained its last and decided expression, and what he is then, he will be for ever. To die, then, in our sins, is to have our sins fastened upon us for ever; to have all the guilt of our innumerable offences stamped darkly and indelibly upon us; to be made sinners for ever; to be brought so absolutely under the established dominion of sin, that the necessity of sinning becomes the very law and condition of our existence. It is to be fixed in an everlasting hatred of God; to become immortally his enemy, and to have Him immortally for our enemy. And there will be no reasons for forbearance

John. ix. 4.

Eccles. ix. 10.

then. *This* life it is that is the state of probation ; *that* is the state in which the results alone of probation are displayed. *This* life it is that is the scene of mercy and long-suffering ; *that* is the scene of justice and judgment, when God will be manifested in all his terrible majesty, to trample upon his enemies, and to vindicate his law.

Now we shall not attempt to dilate upon this. We shall say nothing of the manner and form in which the wrath of God will be inflicted. We shall leave it to your own hearts to meditate upon *the terror of the Lord* : but what we would earnestly impress upon 2. Cor. v. 15. your consideration is just this thought, that to die in our sins is to be fixed unalterably in this relation of hostility to God, and to have Him for our implacable and everlasting Foe.

But to die so ! Why, even in the happiest circumstances, with everything to comfort and sustain us ; with all that sympathy can do to lighten suffering, with all that a *good hope through grace* can do to 2 Thess. ii. 16. support the believing spirit in its passage through the dark valley, death is still an awful thing ; nor can anyone stand by the couch of the dying, without feelings that cannot be uttered. But to die in our sins ! Why, compared with this what are the most loathsome forms of bodily disease ; what the sharpest pangs of dissolution ; what to pine friendlessly away in all the forlornness of solitude and poverty : what to die by violence, or to die of thirst,

or to die in a dungeon, or to die at the stake? Terrible as these things seem to mortal apprehension, their terrors vanish in comparison of those, invisible though they be, and only spiritually discerned, which gather round the death-bed of the man that lies dying in his sins! For what relief can be ministered to him? What avails it that he has at his command all the resources of wealth, and luxury, and art, and affection, to soothe and comfort him? These things will not change the heart; they will not affect the character; they will not prevent it from stiffening into a rigid and unalterable hostility to God, nor will they avert from him the frown of that Almighty Being whose enemy he is, nor arrest the dreadful fate which is descending upon his soul. *If God be for us*, exclaims the Apostle, cheerfully contemplating the worst possibilities of human malice and persecution—*if God be for us, who can be against us?* Oh! then, reverse the sentiment, and what shall we say? If God be against us, what can then avail us?

Rom. viii. 31.

It is well for us to think of these things, painful and repugnant though they be. The warning in the text was not uttered by our Lord to be flippantly dismissed, and it can be only salutary therefore solemnly to ponder it. Suffer us then to suggest one further consideration illustrative of the dreadfulness of such a death, and this is, that to die in our sins must be to die either in spiritual insensibility,

in spiritual despair, or in spiritual presumption ; and which of these is the most awful it is hard to say.

To think of a *man*, a moral, responsible, immortal being, dying as the brute dies ; going into eternity as blindly and recklessly *as an ox goeth to the slaughter*, his reason, his conscience, his spiritual nature Prov. vii. 22. and faculties so sunk in stupidity, so palsied and deadened by sin, that neither heaven, nor hell, nor all the powers and possibilities of the world to come are able to affect him with any emotion ! Or to think of a man so hardened into indifference by an infidel philosophy, that having reasoned God out of existence, and reduced immortality to a dream and retribution to a bugbear, he can reconcile himself to annihilation, and “make mouths at the invisible event !”—Thus it is that, brutified by sensuality and worldliness, or intoxicated “*by* Col. ii. 8. *philosophy and vain deceit*”—thus alas ! it is that some men die and go to their account ; but is it thus that any of us would wish to *appear before the* 2 Cor. v. 10. *judgment seat of Christ ?*

Or look at the reverse of such scenes, and instead of dying in this state of spiritual insensibility and unconcern, let the man be thoroughly alive to a consciousness of his true character and condition, and feel himself dying in his sins. Between apathy, and despair—between the infidel levity that can make a jest of death, and that overwhelming faith which apprehends only *the terror of the Lord*, and shrinks

Rev. vi. 16.

from *the wrath of the Lamb*—how terrible the choice ! Has all mortality a sight to shew more sad and tragical than either ?

Jer. vi. 14.

Yet one glance more at the death-bed of the self-deluded—the man dying in a state of presumption—presuming upon God's mercy ; flattering himself that he is at peace with God ; but resting his assurance upon no Scriptural foundation, but merely upon some fancy of his own—his own virtues and good name, or the venial nature of his sins, or some vague notion of the abstract goodness and mercy of God, or some other of the numberless fallacies with which men deceive themselves into a false repose. And in this state the man dies : dies fearlessly, perhaps tranquilly : but is such presumption less awful than despair ? Less shocking it may be to witness, but is it less fatal in itself, or less lamentable to reflect upon ? The man dies fearlessly and even tranquilly ; but he dies trusting in a fallacy : he dies saying *Peace, Peace* to himself, *when there is no peace* : he dies in his sins, and oh ! the moment after death—the surprise and dismay with which he suddenly discovers himself to be the enemy of God, and sees the dreadful truth he would not see before !

There are times, it is said, states of intense and overpowering emotion, when we live years in a moment : but that moment—that moment when the dread reality flashes in all its force through the soul of the lost immortal—oh ! surely the sufferings of

eternity itself must be condensed in the horror of that moment, the pang of that discovery !

Shocking as all this may be, it is yet only very feebly illustrative of the catastrophe against which our Lord warns us in the text, and which He declares to be the inevitable result of unbelief in Him. *If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.* Reject Him, indeed—be indifferent to what He is, and has done for us, and how can we escape ? Unless we cordially accept Him as our Saviour, his sacrifice, so far as we are concerned, has been offered in vain, and to whom else shall we look for salvation ? Unless we individually wash in the fountain divinely opened in his blood *for sin and for uncleanness*, that fountain has, for us at least, been opened Zech. xiii. 1. in vain. Unless we avail ourselves of the mediation of Him who is the *one mediator between God and men*, 1 Tim. ii. 6. we have no *advocate with the Father*, no *peace with God*. 1 John ii. 1. We are still at enmity with God, and God Rom. v. 1. with us. We are still in our sins, and in our sins we shall continue, unless believing the testimony of which God has given us of his Son, we repair earnestly to Him for deliverance from them, casting ourselves upon his mercy, and yielding ourselves to his will. This it is to believe in Him ; and thus believing, we shall be delivered from ultimately dying in our sins, by now dying *to* them. For never let it be forgotten, that the faith by which we are to be saved is not a mere naked trust in the sacri-

fice and righteousness of Christ, but a principle of holy obedience: an active and sanctifying principle, working in us a death unto sin, and a new life unto righteousness: a principle which transforms the whole character of the man, inspiring him with love for what he formerly hated, and hatred for what he formerly loved, and constraining him to live no longer to himself, but to Him who died for him, and earnestly to follow after that *holiness, without which no man can see the Lord*. If our belief in the Gospel, if our trust in Christ have not this operation in us, we may talk as we will, but our faith is presumption, our religion is hypocrisy; we are yet in our sins, and unless we attain to that *faith which worketh by love*, we shall also die in our sins.

2 Cor. v. 11.

Heb. xii. 14.

Gal. v. 6.

Brethren, do we think of these things? Do we think of them as we ought? Do we think of the certainty of death, of the rapidity with which that day is advancing upon us, and of the decisive effect of death upon the character,—how it stamps a man for eternity, and makes him unalterably that which then he is? Do we think as we ought that when we come to die, we must either die in our sins, in all their guilt and pollution, or die delivered from them: that *here* only is the opportunity of mercy, and that there is no forgiveness *there*? Do we think of what we actually are: whether we are *now* in our sins, or whether through the grace of God, sin hath lost its old dominion over us? Do we think of the

force of habit, and the progress of character; how that men generally, with very, very rare exceptions, die just as they live; and of the awful probability, therefore, that present unbelief will terminate in final impenitence, and that living in sin, in our sins we shall also die?

Surely, oh! surely it is not without abundant reason that we pray—"From all evil and mischief,
"from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil,
"from thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation,
"Good Lord, deliver us!"



SOWING AND REAPING.

GALATIANS vi. 7.

“Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

IN the context, the Apostle is exhorting the Galatians to the exercise of Christian liberality and beneficence, in their several relations as members of society and members of the Church. And in order to give due weight and emphasis to his exhortations, and to supply them with a motive of adequate force, he suddenly raises their thoughts from the particular duty which he is enjoining to a great and general principle in our moral and spiritual life. He tells them that nothing here terminates in itself; that every thing has its own specific consequences hereafter; that our thoughts and feelings, our dispositions, tempers, actions, habits, have a direct and inevitable influence upon our future and final condition; that eternity, in short, is the harvest of time; our conduct here bearing precisely the

same relation to our condition hereafter, which the seed, the soil, and the culture of the ground, bear to the produce of harvest. *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

A truth so solemn and momentous has a force of its own, which can be neither increased nor diminished by any reasonings with which it may be accidentally associated; and we have, therefore, no hesitation in detaching it from its connection in the epistle, and presenting it to your consideration in its own naked and abstract importance.

The imagery in the text is familiar to us all. Every one knows that the bounty of the earth is not spontaneous; that the soil must be cultivated in order to be productive; and that, in proportion to the care and skill exerted in its cultivation, is the advantage which is subsequently to be obtained. If good seed be plentifully sown in well prepared soil, we expect a proportionate crop. If the seed be only scantily sown, or the soil be ill prepared, we expect only a scanty crop. The order of nature, the settled course of providence, leads us to expect that by using means adapted to the end, the end will correspond with the means.

We also know that by the law of vegetation, like things produce like. If we sow wheat we expect to reap wheat. If we sow tares we expect to reap tares. The order of providence is in this respect so certain and invariable, that whatever may be the

quality of the soil, whatever the abundance or the scantiness of the crop, as to the main point in question, we infallibly expect that the produce of the soil shall, in kind, identically correspond with the seed that was sown.

Now the apostle asserts that the natural relation between seed-time and harvest, and the moral relation between time and eternity, that is, between our present character and conduct, and our condition in a future state of being, are exactly parallel cases; He solemnly asserts that the man that *soweth to his flesh*,—the man that yielding himself to the instincts and impulses of his lower nature, lives for this world to the neglect of the life to come—that for such a man to expect happiness hereafter, or anything but the total ruin of his nature, is as absurd, as extravagant, as monstrously groundless, as for the man who has neglected the proper tillage of his land to expect that his bad husbandry should be rewarded with a luxuriant harvest, or that the law of vegetation should be suspended in his favour, and wheat be produced where he had been sowing only tares. On the other hand the apostle asserts that *he that soweth to the Spirit*,—he that yields himself up to the governance and guidance of the Spirit of God, cultivating in his own heart those principles and affections which God's Holy Spirit is given us to produce—that such a man, preparing for eternity in such a character, may as infallibly expect

life everlasting, as he may expect to reap a harvest of grain corresponding in kind to the seed he has sown. The apostle regards the two cases as precisely parallel; both being the ordination of the same sovereign and almighty providence; the one a law of the moral world, even as the other is a law of the material world. So that for wickedness here to result in happiness hereafter: for holiness here to result in misery hereafter; for wickedness to issue in anything but misery, or for holiness to issue in anything but happiness, is just as impossible as for a man to subvert the constitution of nature, and to hurl the Almighty from his throne.

In addition to this we may observe that the process of vegetation is a process of evolution and increase. The solitary seed which is cast into the earth springs out of the earth in a new form, its essential principle still the same, but its latent powers and properties unfolded and disclosed. The grain of wheat shoots forth a blade, a stalk, an ear; and rising to perfection reproduces and multiplies itself, and yields thirty, sixty, a hundred fold. The acorn deposited in the soil germinates, and sprouts, and shoots out bough after bough, and branch after branch, until, having arrived at maturity, it has grown up and expanded into "the unwedgeable and gnarled oak" in all its gigantic and magnificent proportions. Vast, however, and astonishing as is the change, the only difference is that the vital

principle of the acorn has had free and unobstructed operation, its latent energies have had full scope and activity ; so that the stately and imperial object you now behold, with its massive trunk, its vast and spreading branches, beneath which the cattle of the forest may herd and shelter, is merely that little seed, with its secret powers and properties discovered, arrived at maturity and perfection. What, if there be a similar law of evolution and increase in the moral and spiritual economy ! What, if the principles, the dispositions, the tastes, the habits which we form and cherish here, in this the spring and seed-time of our existence, shall hereafter shoot up into maturity, and be developed in a proportion corresponding to the mighty change which we are then to experience in the mode of our existence, and in our capacities of thought, and feeling, and action !

Our future and eternal condition assumes therefore an aspect peculiarly awful and affecting, when regarded in the light of the analogy by which the Apostle illustrates it. For who shall tell us what terrible potentiality for evil and misery may lie latent in sin ? Even here its effects are beyond expression disastrous. It has "brought death into the world with all our woe ;" and in the sowing and reaping which is going on around us in the daily experience of life, we have fearful exhibition of its malignant power. But if this life be merely the seed-time ; if sickness, and disease, and death, in

all their various ghastly shapes ; if the accumulated ills and agonies, the innumerable wild disorders with which mortality is distracted—if these are the effects of sin in this its merely germinal state, what shall be the character and description of that future life, in which all its latent malignity will be developed and matured ? On the other hand, if even here *wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace* ; if *believing*, we may even here *rejoice with* Prov. iii. 17. *joy unspeakable and full of glory*, what must be that 1 Pet. i. 8. state of blessedness which is hereafter to be realized, when all the internal forces and capabilities of the redeemed and sanctified spirit are disclosed, and we attain to the maturity and consummation of our nature ? We leave it to your own thoughts to carry out the analogy. We must content ourselves with the general declaration which cannot be too solemnly pondered, that Eternity is the harvest of Time ; that *whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption : but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.*

Without then at present going any further, it must be obvious from what has been said, that no fallacy can be more fatal, than to imagine that a good hope for eternity can be based upon anything separate from the actual state of the mind itself : the principles that govern it, the dispositions that are cherished, the affections that are indulged, the habits that

are formed; or to imagine that eternal life is attainable in any other way than through that transforming and sanctifying process which is begun in us and carried on by the Holy Spirit of God, and by which, purified in all our tastes and affections, and delivered from the dominion of the flesh and sense, we are restored to the divine image in righteousness and true holiness, and thus are made *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*. And hence the solemnity of the Apostle's admonition—*be not deceived! God is not mocked*:—a solemnity which surely was not unsuited to the importance of the sentiment, and which as surely was not uncalled for by the deceitfulness of the heart; for irresistible as is the truth of the great principle itself, there is none which we are more reluctant to embrace; and flagrant and fatal as is the opposite error, there is none to which we are more perversely prone, and of which we exhibit more unequivocal manifestations.

For instance:—How many are at this moment recklessly indulging their appetites and passions, living in conscious defiance of the principles and precepts of the Gospel, thick sowing in their souls the seeds of corruption, and yet flattering themselves with the hope of ultimate impunity under the vain presumption, that because man is frail and God is merciful, He will, in generous consideration of their frailty, acquit them of their guilt, and exempt them from punishment!

Brethren, *be not deceived*. Doubtless man is frail, lamentably frail. Doubtless God is merciful, infinitely merciful. And hence that peculiar constitution of things under which He has graciously placed us, and which is so compassionately adapted to the necessities of our frail and fallen nature. Hence that infinite exhibition of his love in the gift of his Son, *that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life*. Hence his long-suffering and forbearance, and the invitations of his gospel, and the influences of his Spirit, that we may repent and believe, and be *justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*. But *despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* Oh! why so misconstrue the divine character and perfections; why so abuse his goodness and grace by the vain imagination that He is too merciful to be just, too merciful to be true, too merciful to be holy? What! Is He greater in any one perfection than He is in any other? Has He ceased to be *a just God*, because He is *a Saviour*? Or shall He violate his laws because you condemn them? Shall He falsify his word because you disregard it? Shall He revoke his threatenings because you defy them? Shall He alter the provisions of his covenanted mercy, because your continuance in sin is beyond the scope of its conditions? *Be not deceived! God is not mocked*. To hope for pardon without

repentance; to hope to be saved without trusting in the Saviour; to neglect the means of grace, and yet to hope for glory; to presume upon God's abstract goodness, and yet callously to reject his offered mercy—what is all this but to be miserably self-duped and deluded? What is it but hoping for the end without using the means; hoping to reap without first having sown; or rather preparing a harvest of direst calamity, *sowing the wind to reap the whirlwind!*

Hos. viii. 7.

Heb. xii. 14.

There are others, again, and of these it is to be feared not a few, who acknowledge the fallacy of such a presumption, and yet deceive themselves in respect of this great principle by flattering themselves with the hope and purpose of a distant repentance. They know that it is only to repentance and faith that eternal life is promised, and that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* They are conscious, too, that at present they are far from being in that state of mind in which they ought to be, and that were the messenger of Death suddenly to arrest them, they must appear before the great tribunal without the smallest hope to support them in that dreadful presence. And yet knowing this, they can be heedless and unconcerned; they can deliberately postpone all religious solicitude, and deafen themselves to every suggestion of wisdom and experience, with the delusive purpose of repenting sometime—at some indefinite but more convenient

season, when the world shall have loosened its hold upon them, and they shall have more liberty or leisure to attend to the great work of salvation. Or they trust to the contingency of a protracted illness and a lingering death ; to the glooms and shadows of the sick chamber, from which the world and its vanities being all excluded, they may be more susceptible of religious impression, and more alive to the importance of eternity.

Now, we have no desire to limit to your apprehensions the power and mercy of God, or to exaggerate the difficulty of salvation. We do not—we dare not assert that a genuine repentance is in such circumstances impossible ; but we do assert, and we are warranted in the assertion, as well by the known laws and operations of the human mind as by the authority of Scripture itself, that if such a thing be possible, it is a possibility of the very last and lowest degree, whereas it is an improbability of the very highest. We do not now insist upon the precariousness of opportunity, the uncertainty of life, and the consequent danger of procrastination. What we are more especially anxious to impress upon your consideration is, the nature of repentance itself, and the unquestionable fact that the difficulty of repentance is necessarily augmented the longer repentance is delayed. We beg you to consider that that indisposition to religion in which the purpose of a distant repentance originates, must

necessarily strengthen in proportion as it is indulged; day by day, insensibly it may be, but not the less surely, increasing in force and intensity, until at length it becomes fixed and inveterate, and consolidated into a habit of almost invulnerable repugnance. It is obvious too, that a change of character, let it take place when it may, is not a momentary work, but a gradual process: and that in proportion to the fixedness of the character—in proportion to the inveteracy of those principles and dispositions and habits in which the change is to be wrought, must be the arduousness of the process. No one who has ever attempted to estimate the force and tyranny of habit, but must see the absurdity of supposing that the mind which has grown up to maturity under a set of influences by which it has been moulded to a certain defined and permanent expression, should under any circumstances be able suddenly to transform itself into an entirely new and opposite character; or that it should be susceptible of such a transformation by the operation of an influence which it has uniformly and habitually resisted, and in resistance to which it has attained its present expression. Principles are not imbibed, habits are not discarded, tastes and dispositions are not changed into their opposites in a moment. Except under circumstances most exceptionally rare, this is no sudden and instantaneous operation, but manifestly a work of time. And before new principles are

implanted old principles must be extirpated ; before new habits are acquired old habits must be abandoned ; before *the new man* is put on *the old man* must Ephes. iv. 22. be put off ; just as the land must be cleared of weeds before it can be sowed for the harvest ; so that he who defers his repentance to a sick bed and a dying hour, is crowding and condensing a work of time into the compass of a few brief moments ; and is guilty of a folly infinitely more enormous than that of the man who has delayed the tillage of his land until harvest-time has come, when nothing but a miracle can afford him a crop.

These considerations, however, evident and momentous as they are, are all wilfully excluded from the view of him who encourages himself in present impenitence by the hope and purpose of a distant repentance. He trusts to the power of his own will, which, as the awful period of his departure draws near, he fondly believes he shall be able to exert with an energy adequate to the great crisis : not considering that his will is just as much under the tyranny of habit as any other of his faculties, and that it must be itself emancipated before it can be capable of that energy upon which he relies :—not considering too—oh, fatal oversight ! that repentance is no mere alteration of the outward and visible deportment, but of mental habit and spiritual disposition ; and that that sorrow and contrition of soul, that hatred of sin, that *hunger and thirst after*

Matt. v. 8. *righteousness*, that yearning for renewal in the divine image, that thorough change, in short, of heart and mind in which genuine repentance consists, is not a thing which he can will into existence just when it may suit his convenience. He forgets that for this a more than human will is necessary; that a super-human and divine influence is required—the gracious agency and help of the Holy Spirit of God, working in him both to will and to do—that same divine Agent, whom, in his ordinary and regular approaches, he has hitherto resisted and repulsed; and who, therefore, to work effectually within him now, must interpose with an extraordinary, and in reference to the established economy of grace, with a miraculous exhibition of power and mercy. But what right has he to expect a miraculous interposition of mercy who has all along been deliberately rejecting the ordinary means of mercy—stubbornly hardening himself against his Saviour's love, and doing *despite*

Heb. x. 29. *to the Spirit of grace?* You would pity the insanity of the man, who, having neglected all preparations for harvest until the period of harvest was at hand, should expect that a miracle would be wrought in his favour; that his sloth and negligence should, by an extraordinary interposition of Providence, be rewarded with those advantages which, in the established order of Providence, are annexed only to diligent exertion and careful husbandry. You perceive immediately the insanity of such an

expectation in the ordinary business of life, and unhesitatingly acquiesce in the equity of that arrangement by which it is determined that he who fails to sow shall also fail to reap. *And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them that do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?*

Rom. ii. 8.

Brethren, *be not deceived!* There is not a single authority in Scripture upon which such an expectation can be founded. Even the case of the thief on the cross affords no warrant for such a presumption; for of his previous life we have no information whatever, and for anything we know to the contrary, the gracious words which issued from the Saviour's lips when He prayed for his murderers, may have been the first accents of mercy that ever fell upon his ear. And assuredly there is no other instance in Scripture that can lead to such an expectation; but over and over again, in every form of thought and in every variety of language, the sentiment of the text is inculcated, and the honours of eternal life are promised to those alone, who by faith in Christ are livingly united to him, and *by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality*: while, on the other hand, there are

Rom. ii. 7.

warnings the most terrific to those who despise the privileges with which they are favoured, and trifle with the offers of grace. *Because I have called and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand but no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel,*

and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices!

Prov. i. 24.

Be not deceived! Be assured, that it is the cruellest venture in the world to leave the vast concerns of eternity to the mercies of a moment; to suspend your everlasting destiny upon the contingencies and possibilities of a dying hour. Not that at that awful period you may not feel, and feel intensely, the dreadful nature of the crisis at which you have arrived. But there is a fear which is too strong for repentance, and which can consist only with remorse: a terror too mighty for effort, for thought, for volition: which amazes and bewilders, which prostrates and paralyzes the soul; which quenches hope, and itself swiftly darkens into despair. And oh! if you would not know what that terror is; if you would not aggravate with its portentous gloom the shadows of that valley through which you must pass, listen to the admonition of the Apostle—*Be not deceived! God is not mocked.*

For whatsoever a man soweth, that, THAT shall he also reap.

Since then these things are so, it becomes an enquiry of the profoundest concern to each of us, how we are employing that life which is given us as a preparation for eternity. What seed am I sowing? What harvest am I preparing for myself? What are those principles, and dispositions, and habits, which I am cherishing? Am I sowing to the flesh, or to the spirit? Am I living to self, or to God? in the lusts of the flesh, or in the tempers, and graces, and practices of the Gospel? Oh! let me not waste this, the precious seed-time of my existence, in vitiating pleasures, in sloth and indolence, in vain hopes and fruitless purposes; but let me be roused to holy activity in my high and heavenly calling! Let me beseech of Him *who will render to every man according to his deeds*, to strengthen me *with might by his Spirit in the inner man*; that so, with a vigour of purpose which no temptation can overpower, I may work while it is day, knowing that *the night cometh when no man can work*; and whatsoever my hand findeth to do, let me do it with my might; knowing that *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither I am going!*

Rom. ii. 6.

Ephes. iii. 6.

John ix. 4.

Eccles. ix. 10.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE xvi. 25.

“ But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”

IS poverty then a virtue, or is wealth a crime, that in the state after death Lazarus should be thus blessed, and the rich man plunged into this abyss of torment? Or is our condition in the world to come to be simply the reverse of our condition in this, that we find the poor man thus enriched, and the rich man thus impoverished? Was this the moral which our Lord designed to enforce by the awful parable from which the text is taken? Not so. Only a few verses before, we find him representing wealth in a very different light, and exhorting to the right employment of it here as instrumental in securing our welfare hereafter. *I say unto you, make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting* Luke xvi. 9. *habitations.* We know, too, that Abraham himself,

by whom the reproof in the text is administered, had been rich and powerful, and numbered with the princes of the people. Neither, then, is poverty a virtue, nor is opulence a crime, nor is our condition in the next world to be determined by our circumstances in this : but—*whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.* This is the Gal. vi. 7, 8. grand lesson which our Lord designed to teach us ; and to teach it the more impressively, he drew aside for a moment the dark curtain of eternity, and permitted us a glimpse both of heaven and hell.

There was a certain rich man who was clothed with purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day : and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. Bold and vigorous painting this, in the highest, grandest style ; every touch a master-stroke. But we are not called to criticism. What we are chiefly concerned to remark is, the *characters* set before us by our Lord, and what it was that constituted the evil of the one, and the excellence of the other. And here you will observe that no positive criminality is imputed to the rich man. All that our Lord says of him is, that he was rich, that he was *clothed in purple and fine linen*, and that he *fared sumptuously every day*.—He was rich :

but as there is no crime in being rich, so no intimation is given us of anything criminal in the manner in which he acquired his riches. Nothing of dishonesty, or rapacity, or oppression, is alleged against him: but for anything that appears to the contrary, he may have inherited a large patrimony, or have risen to affluence by honest industry in his calling. Nor is it intimated that he was haughty or insolent in the possession of his wealth; that he was vainly ostentatious of it, or that he employed it in vicious indulgences, or for criminal ends. Our Lord's silence upon these points, as Massillon has remarked in his celebrated sermon on this subject, totally exempts him from all reproaches of this kind. It is true that he went clothed in costly attire, *in purple and fine linen*; but we are not told that in this respect he was a fop or a coxcomb, or that he exceeded the limits which custom and common sense prescribed to persons of his condition. No; he was rich, and he went richly attired, in a manner correspondent to his ample fortune. He also *fared sumptuously every day*; but it does not appear that he was guilty of debauchery or excess. His table was luxuriously spread, but we are not told that it was the scene of riot and intemperance; that he was a drunkard or a glutton, or that he delighted in the society of sots and libertines. No hint of this kind is dropped to his disadvantage, nor anything even to raise suspicion that he was selfish in his indul-

gences, or that he did other than live in a style of large and magnificent hospitality. Some, indeed, have surmised from the fact that Lazarus lay at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from his table, that he was hard and unfeeling to the destitute and the poor: that, wantoning in voluptuousness himself, he was incapable of being moved by the sight of distress: but there seems nothing in the narrative that leads us to suppose that our Lord intended to represent him as wanting in common humanity. Lazarus was laid at his gate, a public mendicant; and certainly, in his diseased and afflicted condition, a loathsome spectacle; but he was not spurned churlishly and contemptuously away: on the contrary he was permitted to remain there, and to make the entrance to the rich man's mansion, his ordinary place of resort. He lay there also in hope of being occasionally relieved by the rich man's charity; and as he seems to have been daily brought there for this very purpose, we may fairly presume that his expectations were not disappointed, and that he was from time to time fed from the remnants of the rich man's repasts. Nothing to the contrary is even insinuated when Abraham apprises the lost soul of his perdition. He does not say Lazarus was a hungered, and thou didst not feed him; he was sick, and thou didst not minister unto him! He only says *Son, remember, that thou in thy lifetime receivest*

thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. It is in these words, indeed, that we find the clue to the rich man's character. He had received *his good things*. The things that he had esteemed most highly : the things in which he placed his happiness : the things for which he lived and wished to live—these things he had received. He had looked no further than this present world and the good this world could give him, and this he had enjoyed ; of this he had had his fill. God, and God's service, law, duty, responsibility, the life to come, and preparation for that endless life—these things had had no share in his anxieties. He had taken up his portion here ; he had made no provision for the great hereafter ; and when therefore he awakes from his dream of sensual bliss, it is to find himself in hell, a lost soul ; destitute, beggared, stripped of everything but the terrible recollection of a mispent life, the fiery remorse of conscience, the sense of unutterable woe, the deep, intolerable consciousness of total perdition. He had sown to his flesh, and of the flesh he now reaped corruption. He had lived a life, unstained indeed by any flagrant vice, and irreproachable according to the manners and maxims of worldly morality, but a life of mere earthliness and self-indulgence, and this was the end of it ! *The rich man died, and was buried, and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.*

The character of Lazarus our Lord leaves to be

inferred from the felicity to which he was exalted. Poor in circumstances, he was also poor in spirit; and he inherited, therefore, the blessedness divinely promised to the meek and humble heart. He was a true son of Abraham; the subject of the same faith, and heir, therefore, with him of the same promise. As a sinful man, deserving nothing at the hand of God, but lying simply at his mercy, he was content to be *destitute, afflicted, tormented*; to be a stranger and pilgrim on earth, looking for his home and happiness above, in that better, that heavenly country, where God would not be ashamed to acknowledge him as his own. In that blessed hope and prospect he patiently suffered and thankfully endured, *looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, and reckoning the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.* He had sowed to the spirit, and of the spirit he reaped life everlasting. *It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.*

Heb. xi. 37

2 Cor. iv. 18.

Rom. viii. 18.

Now when we remark this difference in the characters of the two men, the difference in their circumstances becomes yet more striking. Striking indeed it is to look upon society, and to reflect on the manner in which good and evil are distributed by divine providence in the present world. The superficial appearance of things is, no doubt, very fallacious. Things are not always what they seem.

Wealth is not happiness. Luxury is not comfort. Abundance produces satiety, and satiety fastidiousness and disgust. And there are besides, in the circumstances and condition of every man, discomforts and troubles, which, whatever his means and opportunities of enjoyment, whatever the smoothness of his temper or the easiness of his disposition, are continual, though perhaps ineffectual monitors that this is not his rest, and that *a man's life* is very far from consisting *in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*. But making every allowance for considerations of this nature, still, what a different thing is life to different men ! Between health and sickness, between affluence and poverty, between the condition of the rich man in the parable, and the diseased mendicant forlornly lying at his gate, with the dogs licking his sores, how wide and shocking is the contrast ! What a different thing must life be to those, whose days, from early morning through to latest eve, are spent in the same dull, constant, monotonous drudgery of turning a wheel or twining a thread, or plying their weary fingers in close, sedentary, heart-wasting toil, for a pittance, after all, too scanty to keep body and soul together ; from what it is to those who work elegantly at their own will, and just to give a zest to leisure ! It is only a few years ago, that the heart of the whole country was electrically touched by a song descriptive of the sorrows of such a life of obscure and

painful drudgery :* a song that went to the heart just because it came from the heart, and was the genuine groan of the poet's own distressed and overburdened spirit. What a stern and terrible thing was life to him, with his fine sensibilities and warm affections, anguished and crushed by continual distress, and how different a thing to the thousands of his readers, who paid his verse the tribute of their tears, and to whom it was a luxury thus to weep ! Looking at the world just as it is, and confining ourselves to this world only, what a mystery in this wide, this uncontrollable inequality of condition ! And what serves inexpressibly to heighten the mystery is, that these diversities of condition are so signally irrespective of moral character and conduct ! It is not the richest that are the best, nor the most depraved that are the poorest and most afflicted. Were this the case we could understand it ; but it is often quite the contrary. Often it is vice that seems to prosper, and virtue that goes starving. Health and sickness, riches and poverty, joy and sorrow, success and disappointment, seem scattered over human life in a manner the most indiscriminate and capricious. There seems no rule, no principle, no method, no order, no providence in it at all ; but rather the wonderful absence of wisdom and justice ; a confusion and disorder that could scarcely

* The Song of the Shirt.

be surpassed were the moral world left to the government of chance alone ! A man living in utter godlessness will often seem the special favourite of heaven ; while another man whose great and constant concern it is *to do justice, to love mercy, and walk humbly with his God*, is to all human appearance neglected and forgotten even by the Omniscient Himself. *Heir of salvation* though he be, no *ministering spirit* seems to wait upon him, but harassed by a thousand adversities, the heavens seem all as pitiless to him as the earth. So it is ! And though it may be easy for those who are mercifully exempted from such calamities to acquiesce in the wisdom and goodness of the present administration of divine providence, it requires no little strength of faith in those whose lot is thus cast in suffering and sorrow, to acknowledge in it all the wise and gracious hand of God, and humbly looking up to Him to say, *Even so, Father ; for so it seemeth good in thy sight !*

Micah vi. 8.

Heb. xii. 28.

Matt. xi. 26.

This apparently indiscriminate distribution of good and evil is, however, but for a time. Life, and the distinctions of life, its wealth and its poverty, its pleasures and its pains, are but for some three score years and ten, and then there is an end. Then another scene opens, and other distinctions are entered upon, to which all former distinctions are as nothing. *It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich*

man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments.—We have been considering a little what a different thing *life* is to different men, let us now for a moment or two consider what a different thing *death* is to different men.

Death is indeed commonly said to level all distinctions; and in one sense this is doubtless true; *for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave;* but all lie there on the same low level of ignominy. *The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master.* Little matters it to the dead where they are laid; whether sepulchred under a pyramid, or simply buried in the sands. The fondness of human affection endeavours, indeed, to perpetuate the distinctions of life in the regions of mortality and destruction; but the vulgarest eye can see, that, whether entombed with the pageant of a royal funeral, or earthed with the cold, unattended interment of a pauper, it is all one to the departed. In this respect Death is truly said to be the Grand Leveler. But in other respects, how truly may he be called the Grand Discriminator!—*It came to pass that the beggar died.* Well; it would be no such dreadful thing to him to die. Death could have but few terrors to him who had so long been familiar with corruption, and for whom life had so few charms. The hope that was in him would have disarmed it of its worst terrors, and disease and wretchedness

Eccles. ix. 10.

Job iii. 19.

would have done the rest. To him, instead of the pale, stern, dreaded Messenger of Fate, it would rather come like the delivering angel to St. Peter, to strike off his fetters, and release him from his dungeon. Long and impatiently had he seen it hovering in the distance ; and now he would cheerfully welcome its approach, and gladly put off the prison garments of mortality, to escape from the *bondage of corruption*. And then, there was that celestial escort waiting for his emancipated spirit, to waft it to the honours and blisses of the upper skies ! Oh, the wondrous transition from friendlessness and distress, from pain, and suffering, and the long agony of life, to the undisturbed tranquillity of the heavenly rest ; to the sweet and congenial *society above ; to the spirits of just men made perfect ;* to the sympathies and congratulations of those, who through much tribulation had entered the kingdom, where they *hunger no more, neither thirst any more ;* where there is no more sorrow, *neither any more pain, for the former things are passed away !* There we must leave his delighted spirit, to the deep enjoyment of its ineffable repose, while we turn to the contemplation of a different scene.

The rich man also died and was buried. Ay, die he must, however loth to die. The appointed time arrives, the time of terrible reverse, and however passionately he may cling to life, all his resources are unavailing to retard its coming for an hour.

It comes, the inexorable foe; arrests him in the midst of his luxuries, strips him of all his wealth, forces him away from all his enjoyments, to go—he knows not where; and be—he knows not what! He dies; and in the midst of all his opulence, dies poor as the very poorest! How he died, in what temper, in what spirit, we are not told: but probably in the same spirit in which he lived, full of the world and the world's recklessness, resigned only because he could not resist. But he died, and was buried: with funereal honours doubtless; all the shews and trappings of ceremonial grief; a long and plumed procession, a train of mourning friends, all that affection, all that vanity could do, to give importance to his ashes. Terrible it is to think, while all this was going on about his grave, where the man himself was gone, and what he was doing! Terrible to think how, while all this homage was being lavished on his memory, *in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments!* That baleful look from out the dark abyss, upward, upward to where he sees *Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom:* that anguished cry, *Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame!* that impassable gulf; the cold, unpitying, hopeless repulse of that *Son, remember!*—these things we dare not attempt to describe. They must be left to your own reflections in the language of Him, who

spake as never man spake. And no language can so terrifically tell us how different a thing death is to different men, and how all the widest diversities of our earthly condition, are nothing to the differences which Death produces.

No: but let it be considered, that these differences are determined by another rule than that which regulates the diversities of our present lot: that while these latter are so often irrespective of character and conduct, and are determined for us by the uncontrollable sovereignty of God, who makes some vessels to honour and others to dishonour, lifting up or casting down at his own good pleasure, the former are dependent upon character alone; that it is what we are *here* that will determine what we shall be *hereafter*; that *whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit, reap life everlasting. God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.* This is his merciful purpose concerning us; and for this purpose He hath called us to the knowledge of his gospel, and vouchsafed to us the means of grace: and if, therefore, we fail, of this salvation, it is not from any defective mercy on his part, but only because we despise the riches of his mercy, and after our own *hardness and impenitent heart, wantonly*

1 Thess. v. 9.

Rom. ii. 4 6.

treasure up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render unto every man according to his deeds. We are thus, under the gracious economy of the Gospel, the arbiters of our own destinies, the makers of our own immortal fates. It is not He who hollows out for us the bottomless abyss, but we that sink it for ourselves. The worm that devours us is of our own engendering: the fire that torments us with its unquenchable flame, is of our own lighting; and though, in the abundance of his grace and goodness, He hath prepared for them that love Him such good things as pass man's understanding, yet still will the measure of our happiness be in proportion to our holiness, and according to the amount of our labours will be the lustre of our crown.

And let it be remembered that it is not alone *the positive vices* that will ensure our ruin. It is not alone those practices and habits which worldly morality itself condemns, that will exclude us from the great salvation. The rich man in the parable was, as we have before observed, characterised by none of these gross irregularities, but, for anything that appears to the contrary, was a man of popular virtues and irreproachable manners. And why was it that he fell into this condemnation? Why, not so much because of what he was, as because of what he was not. Not because of his purple and fine linen; not because he lived in a style corresponding with

his station, and fared sumptuously every day; not because of these things, but because, though he might not injure men he did not honour God; because his affection was set on the world, and the things of the world, the honours and enjoyments of the present life; because these things were *his good things*, and he had no care or thought for anything beyond them. He was an *unprofitable servant*, and he met with the unprofitable servant's doom. This was his guilt, and his condemnation this. A solemn lesson! A solemn lesson to us all, more especially to those among us whom Providence has blessed with wealth or competence, and whose peculiar temptation it is to live to ourselves; to find our good things here, and to lap ourselves up in self-indulgent ease and indolence. But this will never do. This is fatally to disregard our position, our duty, *our high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. God has called us to *holiness*; He has called us to *virtue*; to the active virtues of the Christian life. He has called us to *adorn his doctrine in all things*; to *let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is heaven*. Our Saviour Jesus Christ gave himself for us, not only *that he might redeem us from all iniquity*, but that he might also *purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*. As Christians we are to *live not unto ourselves, but unto Him*. We are to illustrate his gospel by cultivating his spirit, and walking in his

Matt. xiv. 30.

Phil. iii. 14.

1 Thess. iv. 7.

2 Pet. i. 3.

Titus ii. 10.

Matt. vi. 16.

Titus ii. 14.

2 Cor. v. 15.

steps. We are to strive to be what He was. And He was no merely negative character; and to resemble Him it is not enough that we are not dissolute and vicious. It is not mere conventional respectability that is the stamp of discipleship, but the spirit of Christ crucified; not plausible manners, nor the virtues and graces current in society, but *love, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.* This is what God demands of us; ^{1 Tim. 1. 5.} and it is according to the presence or the absence of these characteristics in us, that we shall ultimately be accepted or cast away: that, when the fugitive distinctions of this probationary life are over, and we enter upon the retributive and enduring distinctions of the life to come, we shall either be ushered by the angels into the heavenly rest, or have our sad portion with the lost voluptuary, and be tormented in that flame!

THE BOX OF SPIKENARD.

MATTHEW xxvi. 12.

“For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.”

IT is a rare and difficult thing in this world to escape misconstruction and reproach. No matter how simple an action may be, how obvious its intention, or how pure the motive that dictates it, we may count ourselves happy if it passes without censure or suspicion from some quarter or other, when even Mary, the sister of Lazarus, cannot anoint the head of her great and adorable benefactor, but there is a Judas to rail at her extravagance, and others of the disciples to sympathize with his indignation at the waste.

John xii. 4.

St. John, indeed, in his account of the transaction, speaks of Judas as the only murmurer; but that the feeling was not confined to his thievish heart, that he was only the foremost and the loudest in giving expression to a sentiment in which others of them concurred, is pretty clear from the statement in the

chapter before us, where the evangelist says, that *when the disciples saw it, they had indignation*. St. Mark also says, *there were some that had indignation within themselves*. The reproof, too, with which our Lord silenced their animadversions, was evidently addressed not to one, but to several.

Now, that *Judas* should affect a benevolent indignation was only natural and characteristic; but that any other of the disciples should have felt displacement, was, perhaps, scarcely to have been expected. One would have thought that their own reverence for their Great Master would have led them to admire and applaud such an act of homage to his person; and that the costlier the offering the heartier would have been their approval. What! Could they really think the ointment wasted, when poured upon the head of Him whom they themselves recognized as God's Anointed? Or did they so little appreciate his greatness and goodness, that when one who did feel them came and gave this affecting testimony of her reverence and love, their only sentiment was one of indignation at her profusion? They knew, too, who the woman was. They needed no one to tell them that she was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. They knew the love that Jesus felt for all that favoured family, especially for her who sat such an eager listener at his feet. They knew also, how Luke x. 39. doubly He had endeared Himself to her by the wonderful mercy He had so recently shewn her

John xii. 2.

Verse 8.

John xii. 6.

in raising her brother from the grave. And there, too, was Lazarus, *at the table with Him*, the living memorial of his marvellous kindness. Was it possible then, that, when Mary, in some feeble expression of her unutterable gratitude, came and poured the ointment on his gracious head, they should have so little consideration either for her or for their Master, that they could only condemn it as a wasteful extravagance? *To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor!* No; let us not be unjust towards the disciples. In Judas, this was merely the hypocritical expression of disappointed rapacity. *This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag;* from which he would have rejoiced in embezzling to such an amount. Not so with the other disciples. No bad or sordid feeling mingled with their censure; nor probably, would the thought have occurred to them at all, but for the suggestion of the traitor. They knew the benevolence of their Master's heart, and how considerate He was of the wants and distresses of others; they knew how little He cared even for the comforts, still less for the luxuries, of life; and they thought therefore that Judas's observation was only reasonable and right, and that Mary would have acted far more in accordance with the spirit and example of Jesus Himself, whose whole life was a ministry of mercy to the poor, had the precious

balsam been sold, and the money distributed as Judas had suggested. They thought that they understood their Master better than she did, and that they were only entering into his feelings and anticipating his judgment, in thus condemning as extravagance what she meant as devotion.

And plausible enough their reasoning may at first sight seem. Three hundred denarii* would have comforted and cheered many a destitute heart; whereas here, they were suddenly dissipated in a momentary act of homage. Yes; but there is often a lamentable lack of wisdom in these narrow economical calculations of obvious and immediate utility. Had Mary acted as the disciples would have had her act; had she sold the ointment and divided the money among the poor, some would, no doubt, have been directly benefitted at the time; but thousands upon thousands in all succeeding ages, would have lost immeasurably more than the objects of her charity would have gained. For how many thousand hearts have been opened by the touching narrative before us! How many thousand thousand times three hundred pence have been given to the poor, as the genuine consequence of this act of devotion! The odour of her ointment filled the house, but John. xii. 8. the odour of her love has filled the world, multiplying its fragrance by spreading its inspiration.

* Upwards of £9.

Had she, indeed, in humble imitation of her Lord's beneficence, sold the spikenard and given its produce among the poor, she would doubtless have done that which would have been acceptable to Him; but she would not have satisfied the instincts and urgencies of her own heart. To do good to others for his sake, would be a very different thing in her eyes from doing homage to Himself, when she had such an opportunity of rendering it. And it is to Himself personally—to Himself, her great and heavenly benefactor, the unction of whose ineffable wisdom and grace had filled her soul with joy unspeakable, that the instinct of her new heart impels her. She reasons not about consequences; she can enter into no cold calculations of comparative utility; she thinks only of Him; she can think only of Him, while He is there and she can do Him reverence; and to Him therefore, she goes, with the costliest offering in her power, and pours out upon his head the precious spikenard—say rather, pours out upon Him her heart, her heart all melted into love and gratitude.

And in this way our Lord Himself regarded her conduct. *Why trouble ye the woman*, He said, tenderly shielding her from the censoriousness of his disciples. More positive and immediate good she might perhaps have done had she thought and reasoned as you think and reason; but could she have more feelingly testified her gratitude and devotion? Why disturb

her with your ungenerous objections, when evidently *she hath done what she could* for the emphatic expression of her love and reverence? Even were she mistaken in offering me such a tribute of affection, it were an error which you might indulgently regard. But it is far from being an error. In thus simply obeying what you consider a thoughtless and extravagant impulse, *she hath wrought a good work upon me.* For the poor, upon whom you think her solicitude were more wisely bestowed, *the poor ye have always with you*, and to their necessities you can always minister; *but me ye have not always.* My absence you will soon be called to lament. The time of my departure is, indeed, so near at hand, that I may look upon myself as already dead, and upon this act of hers, in pouring the ointment upon my body, as the anointing of it *for my burial.* Ah! There is more, far more in such a genuine, earnest act of love, however unnecessary and extravagant it may seem, than you have any conception of; and *verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, and throughout the whole world it shall be preached, there shall also this, which this woman hath done—this simple, signal act of devotion to me—be everlastingly spoken of in its touching connection with my sufferings and death.*

In that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Not, however, that our Lord meant that she was *aware* of his approaching death,

and that she acted thus in ceremonial preparation of his body for interment ; but only that *in effect* it was such a preparation, and in the event would be seen to be so. It would be going too far to understand our Lord's language in this strict and literal sense. Some, it is true, there are, who put this construction upon it, and represent her as deliberately acting with this distinct intention. "Yes," says a divine of deserved celebrity ; "this day is already in the reckoning of Mary's faith, the day of his burial. Her grief anticipates the hour of mourning. She sees the sacrifice already offered ! The victim lies before her ! She sees it already pierced, bleeding, dead ! She pays to this Jesus, yet living and speaking to her, the funeral honours which she had reserved for his lifeless remains ! So lively is her faith ; so much has her grief outstripped time ; so deeply has she entered into the thought and purpose of Jesus Christ."* But surely this is going too far. This is allowing the imagination to run away with the judgment. It is falling into the very common error of attributing to the disciples a clearness of intelligence and an amount of knowledge which they were, at this period, very far from possessing. Love, no doubt, is apprehensive and far-sighted. The heart often sees much further than the head. But nothing is more clear than that,

* Vinet, in his discourse "Le Vase de Parfums."

notwithstanding our Lord's express and repeated declarations that He was to suffer and to die, and to rise from the dead on the third day, his disciples did not understand Him. None of them were able to receive these sayings. True, his language was sufficiently intelligible; but how—if he was really to be crucified and slain—how could He be the Redeemer of Israel? In their view the two things were totally incompatible; and that He could really mean what He said seemed to them, therefore, impossible. In this respect there was nothing to distinguish Mary from the rest. His apprehension and death came upon them all alike with a sudden and overwhelming surprise, fatal to every hope they had cherished respecting Him. It was not, then, in *the anticipation of faith* that she acted as she did; it was not because she was aware that his hour was almost come; but simply because she *loved*, and was zealous to do all she could to do Him honour. It was her love eagerly embracing an opportunity of expressing itself, and thus unconsciously doing a far more beautiful and appropriate thing than she had any thought of doing. *She did it for my burial.* And from this it is, as it strikes me, that our Lord's vindication of her conduct derives its peculiar force and instructiveness. There was a certain solemn propriety in the act totally unintentional on her part; but *because it was done with the simple desire to do Him honour, He graciously accredits her with the*

whole of it. There was a goodness and a beauty in the deed which she herself had never designed; but because of the sanctity of the motive from which she acted, He accepted it just as if she had been aware of all that was to happen to Him, and had anointed his body in distinct anticipation of his burial. And upon precisely the same principle does He represent Himself as proceeding in the day of judgment. *Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came*

unto me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME! They had no thought that they were ministering to Him, when ministering to the wants and sorrows of the afflicted; but because of the love to Him by which they were actuated, He accredits them with a beneficence they never designed, and astonished them by discovering the mighty amount

Matt. xxv. 84.

of goodness that may be involved in one simple act of genuine Christian love, and how far, how infinitely far it reaches, even from earth to heaven ; from the prisoner in his dungeon up to Christ upon his throne !

In that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Such, then, is the gracious principle upon which He acts towards every one that loves Him. And what stronger encouragement could He possibly have given us to the exercise of Christian love and beneficence ? Let the thing but be done heartily and earnestly from simple love to Him, and He graciously accredits the doer of it, not merely with the good which was designed to be its immediate effect, but with all the beneficent results that follow in the long train of its consequences. A good work wrought for Christ does not die away in the doing of it. It lives on. It lives on in its influence on other minds. It lives on in every good thought and feeling and desire, which directly or indirectly it may be the means of exciting. It lives on from generation to generation, with unspent energy and with immortal life ; and the doer of it lives in it, acting still, and like Abel, “*being dead, yet speaketh.*” And thus Mary is pouring out her ointment still, in constant, endless stream ; and ever, as it still flows on, it wins for her the Master’s blessing—*She did it for my burial !* And so, on to the very last result, He will accredit her with all.

Heb. xi. 4.

Ah ! but it is an awful consideration that the like immortality attaches to the evil that we do. Even though it should not corrupt others, it makes the doer worse. It tends to strengthen and inveterate his depravity. But sin begets sin, and that too with a power incalculably prolific. *Dead works*, as the Apostle calls them, from the result in which they naturally issue, are instinct with terrible, with inextinguishable life ; life that works by multiplying death. Evil words, evil deeds, evil example, have all their own necessary and pernicious influences ; and in these influences the man himself lives on, a posthumous life ; acting where he is not, acting ages after his death, and in the eye of God connected with them even to their very last results ; connected with them, ay, and inculcated in them too. A terrible consideration for every man ! A terrible thought, but an uncontrovertible truth. Just as in a good work wrought upon Christ, or for Christ, there is involved an amount of beneficence absolutely immeasurable, and known only to Him who sees it all ; so in the doings of a wicked man, in the disastrous efficacy of his example and influence, there is an amount of evil which eternity alone can declare, but in the whole of which he is implicated ; and not more certainly in the evil which he has consciously committed, than of that of which he has been unintentionally the cause. How many a man ought this fearful consideration to bring to a pause !

How many a man ought it to prostrate at the foot of the Cross, to lay hold there of the means which God has mercifully provided for the expiation of our guilt, and to seek there that new heart and that right spirit which will lead him to labour as zealously for Christ, as he has hitherto lived recklessly against Him !

But looking again at the text, let us endeavour to enter practically into the spirit of this gracious declaration, and to derive from it that stimulus to loving activity for the honour of Christ, which it is designed and adapted to impart.

In that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. In lovingly doing what she could, she did far more than she thought of doing, and Jesus accredited her with it all. This is the moral we are anxious to impress.

All of us, then, can do something. However limited our means or ability, all of us can do something ; and if the love of Christ be in our hearts, something we cannot but do. Inactive and indifferent we cannot be. To Himself—except as He condescends to identify Himself with all who need help, comfort, sympathy, advice, instruction—to Himself personally we can do nothing. But there are those whom He is pleased to call his brethren ; and a good work done unto them, He accepts as a good work wrought upon Himself. In the very humblest effort, honestly and heartily made, to befriend the

destitute, to solace the wretched, to reclaim the vicious, to strengthen the feeble, to instruct the ignorant—oh, believe it!—there is a virtue and a value, with which we indeed can never plume ourselves, but which He, nevertheless, will generously acknowledge to *the praise of the glory of his grace*.
 Only do what you can, and you will do far more than you think of. Comfort but one sorrower, lead but one sinner to the Cross; reclaim but one lost sheep or lamb; instruct but one poor soul believingly to name the name of Jesus; teach but one of his little ones that he has a Saviour in Christ and a Father in God, and you know not what you may be doing. You know not how many you may be benefitting by benefitting one. Eternity alone can tell you, and then you will stand astonished at the result. Your loving efforts will have an immortal operation and imperishable consequences; and with them all you will be graciously identified by Him, who sees the end in the beginning, and the effect in the cause. *The poor, the thoughtless, the ignorant, the afflicted, ye have always with you,* and He has set them before you as representatives of Himself. Let, then, the love of Him who loved us; let the death of Him who died for us; let the life of Him who ever liveth for us—let these constrain you, and you cannot be inactive. Something you will do. And you will do it earnestly and *heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men*.

Ephes. i. 6.

Verse 11.

Col. iii. 23.

Standing, too, as we do on the threshold of another year, when the past with its grave reflections, and the future with its unknown possibilities, are both pressing upon the soul, these considerations seem to come with peculiar solemnity. Another year! And so much more of life is gone, and so much less remains! So much less of ability, and influence, and gracious opportunity—that precious balsam, of which, though bought for us at such a price, we are for the most part so unmindful! How much indeed has been indolently suffered to evaporate or run to waste! How much has been wantonly lavished on objects, far other, alas, than those which Christian love would select! And how scanty the little that may now remain! Whatever the residue, to Thee, O Saviour, be it all devoted! Though but a drop be left, Thou, in thy benignity, wilt not repulse the penitential love that offers even that!

THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

MATTHEW **xxii.** 37, 38.

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.”

BETWEEN human laws and the law of God there is this grand and obvious distinction ; that the former are necessarily confined to external conduct, whereas the latter is directed not merely to actions but to sentiments ; to the affections and disposition of the heart. A human legislature can pass enactments against murder, and theft, and fraudulent practices, and open profanity, because these are outward palpable acts, and within the scope therefore of human cognizance. But here its authority terminates. To go further and say, Thou shalt not covet ; thou shalt not even secretly cherish any malevolent affection, is the prerogative of the Omniscient alone. As, however, human laws partake of human infirmity, so the divine law is

characterized by divine perfection. As *God is a* John iv. 24. *spirit*, so his law is spiritual. It addresses its commands immediately to the spirit of man, and says, Thou shalt not only not *do* wrong, but thou shalt not indulge a wrongful feeling. Thou shalt not only not hate, but thou shalt love. Thou shalt cultivate universal love. “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind ;*” and “*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*”

Let us confine our attention to the former of these two commandments, and to a few considerations which it seems very naturally to suggest. “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*”

Now, that is our duty: that we lie under a natural and necessary obligation to render to Almighty God, our Creator and Preserver, this supreme affection, we surely need not stop to prove; for certainly, if this be not our first and constant duty, nothing in the shape of duty can attach to us at all. But does it not strike you as something remarkable, that this duty should be thus embodied and presented to us in the form of a *command*, a direct, special, peremptory command? *Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord ; and thou shalt love the* Dent. vi. 4, 5. *Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* Are, then, all our affections so absolutely at our own disposal, that we can love

or not love just as we will ? Can we, by the mere force of our own volition, love any particular object when bidden to do so ? For if this be not the case with us, what becomes of the moral fitness of the command ? Now we know that this is not the case with us. We know that our affections are very wayward and intractable, and that love is not a thing that will come and go just as it is bidden. It does not lie at the simple beck and call of the will. In total independence of the will it springs up in the heart at the discovery of the lovely object ; and then, will as we may, we *must* love, for we cannot help it ; but unless the object appear lovely in our eyes, we can no more force ourselves to love it, than we can force it to love us. Where then is the congruity between the commandment before us, and the present constitution of our nature ? How are we to reconcile this command to love with the plain and undeniable fact, that our affections are not in our own power ; not at the disposal of our own will ? Would it not seem that our nature ought to be very differently constituted from what it actually is, in order that such a command might have any moral propriety ?

And the force of this consideration is greatly increased by adverting to the peculiar manner in which the law, of which the text is a brief summary, was originally proclaimed, and the ceremonies of terror that gave emphasis to its delivery. God

Himself came down upon Sinai to give it, and He gave it from the midst of clouds and darkness, fire and smoke, with thunders and lightnings and tempest, and in a voice that shook the very earth, and thrilled the camp of Israel with the fear of instant death :—an assemblage of portents calculated, one would suppose, to excite any affection rather than the affection of love. Certainly it is not thus that *we* endeavour to gain the affections of others. We seek rather to banish fear than to excite it. We never think of extorting love by the force of terror. We know that it is inspired in the heart by the pleasing and the amiable, by kindness and gentleness, not by sternness and severity. Yet here God comes forth, and issues this command to love Him with all the heart and soul and might, while hiding all that is amiable and attractive in his character, and presenting Himself in an aspect the sternest and most terrific! Does not this strike you as something strange and extraordinary? Has it not the appearance of a startling inconsistency? Yet there can be nothing unreasonable or inconsistent in Him. All his procedures towards us must be dictated by the highest reason, his own infinite wisdom: all must be in accordance both with his own divine excellence and our human imperfection. But how, then, are we to reconcile these things with the present constitution of our nature, and the established principles of human action?

Exod. xix. 16.

1 TIM. I. 9.

The law, says St. Paul, was not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners. Were our nature what it ought to be, and what it originally must have been, when God Himself looked upon it with complacency and pronounced it good, the affections would of themselves fasten upon their appropriate objects, and the duty before us would be promptly and spontaneously discharged, without any formal, external law declaring and commanding it. The rule of duty would then be in the heart itself; living there; working there; regulating all our feelings and actions, so that there would be no necessity for any *outward* proclamation of law, prescribing the course our affections should take, and the objects on which they should be set. Were our nature *in order*, it would be in harmony with God, and love to Him would be the governing principle of all our conduct. It was because the rule of duty had ceased to be an *internal* thing; because the law had been taken out of the heart, or almost obliterated within it; because man's moral nature had, under other influences than those which are divine, fallen into a state of disorder; because his affections were alienated from God, and there was disobedience and a perpetual proneness to disobedience,—it was, on this account that the people were arraigned at the foot of Sinai, and that the Law was then fulminated forth with these appalling solemnities; articulated point by

point, commandment after commandment, like so many successive counts in a great bill of indictment against mankind at large. Thus, as the Apostle says, *the Law was added because of transgressions ; the Law entered that the offence might abound ;* that man's lawlessness might be exposed and made palpable, *and all the world become guilty before God.* Had man, we say, continued steadfast in his original integrity, there would have been no necessity for this. He would have been a law unto himself. He would have loved God entirely and supremely from the very bent of his natural disposition. But he has apostatized from God ; his nature has fallen into a state of lawlessness and disorder ; and therefore this great natural duty comes forth in the shape of a stern and peremptory commandment.

Another consideration, however, suggested by this view of the subject, and one that wonderfully alleviates its apparent harshness and severity, is, that in the fact that God has set before us this duty in the form of an express commandment, we have *an unequivocal intimation of his own love for us.* However peremptory the tone of the commandment itself, or however appalling the manner in which it was delivered, God could not have more unequivocally expressed his own love for us, than by commanding us thus to love Him. Facts of our own consciousness familiar to all, will furnish us with clear proof and illustration of this. None of us but

must know that unless we love any particular person ourselves, we do not desire him to love us. We are totally careless about the affections of others except as they are the objects of our own. Then, indeed, and just in proportion to the warmth of our regard for them, do we desire their esteem; but otherwise, whether they love us or not, is a matter about which we are totally indifferent. But love demands love, and will be satisfied with nothing else. No outward service, no show of attention however assiduous, no professions of attachment however emphatic, have any value in our eyes, but as they are the genuine expressions of love; whereas this heightens and dignifies the smallest act, and imparts a nameless value to the most trivial offering. Look, then, at the commandment, as it is illustrated by this consideration. If God demands our love, it can be only because He Himself loves us. If He commands us to love Him *with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind*, it can be only because He Himself loves us with all the ardour of his own infinite nature. He demands only an affection answerable to his own.—Oh, when we think of this, how does the apparent sternness of the commandment vanish! How does the frown sweetly brighten into a smile!

This consideration, however, derives additional strength from the further reflection, that *love is the grand element of all our happiness*. The man who loves

nothing is of necessity miserable. The heart without an object is the saddest and forlornest of all solitary things. There must be some play of the affections, some object or pursuit on which we may fix them, or there is no happiness ; but let there be such an object, and there is a happiness in loving it which is found in nothing else, and which is intense in proportion as the love is strong. In this, we say, it is that all man's happiness consists. In this indeed it is that the happiness of the very angels consists: "for love"—it is no mere flight of fancy—"is heaven, and heaven is love." Yea, in this it is that the happiness of God Himself consists. *God is love*, and therefore He is the *blessed God*. What then is this divine command to love, but just the clear and direct expression of the urgency of God's solicitude for our happiness?—More than this, the great and constant demand of our nature is not merely for something to love, but for something which is really worthy of our affection ; some object that will not only excite but reciprocate it, some object which we may not merely love but worship, with true and rational devotion. With us, indeed, constituted as we are, love is ever a sort of worship: it delights in sacrifices, in bringing gifts and offerings to the shrine of the beloved ; but unless the object of affection be intrinsically worthy of our devotion, the heart is dissatisfied. We feel an unappeasable craving for some still higher object;

1 John iv. 8.

1 Tim. i. 11.

some object so absolutely excellent, that reason and conscience may approve the utmost ardour of devotion to it. Thus it is that no fellow mortal is enough to satisfy the heart, for even in the most amiable and engaging, imperfections are constantly discerned which thwart and disappoint, and infuse an element of bitterness into the cup of joy, so that we have still to look further and higher, if we would know the perfect happiness of perfect love. Such is the nature God has given us. He has placed our happiness in love; He has given us an instinctive craving after something that we may love, and that will reciprocate our affection, and be intrinsically worthy of our highest devotion: and then, in the absence, the hopeless absence of any such object upon earth, He comes to us Himself—He, the Absolutely Good, the Infinitely Adorable, and says, *I am the Lord thy God, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*—why, but that possessed by this supreme affection for the Supreme Object, and rejoicing in the manifestations of his love, we may rise to the experience of all that happiness which, in the immensity of his goodness, He has capacitated us to enjoy!

See then, in this respect the striking accordance between the Law and the Gospel. We sometimes regard them in their points of contrast, and thus we speak of the severity of the Law, and the clemency of the Gospel. We contrast Mount Sinai with

Mount Sion, and rejoice that we *are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest*; but that we *are come unto Mount Sion, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of* ^{Heb. xii. 18.} *Abel*. But the voice that spake from Sinai is the same that speaks from Calvary; and its utterances are the same, though their tone may differ. It is the voice of Love that speaks from both. On Sinai, indeed, it was Love insulted, and provoked to menace; on Calvary, it is Love appeased, melting into mercy. On Sinai, it was Love commanding love, on Calvary, is it Love inviting and inspiring it. On Sinai, it was the stern enunciation of duty; on Calvary, it is the affecting exhibition of the reasons on which it is grounded, and the motives from which it is to be discharged. And thus the Law which denounces death, and the Gospel which announces life, are alike expressions of the love of God.

So much with respect to the commandment itself. Let us now direct your attention to one or two observations upon the possibility of obeying it.

For how, it may be demanded, how—if our affections are not within our own control, if we cannot, by any impulse of volition, *will* love into existence—how is obedience to the commandment possible? Unless it spring up spontaneously in the heart—and

what hope is there of that?—what can we do but simply wait until God shall be pleased to kindle it within us? Does not the apostle, indeed, distinctly say that *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us?*

Rom. v. 5.

True, the apostle does say this; and it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation: but are we, therefore, to be idle, inactive, unconcerned? Are we to yield ourselves up to every lawless desire, every extravagant caprice, every evil propensity, until in judgment or in mercy God shall arrest us in our course? Or are the operations of the Holy Spirit totally irrespective of our own efforts and volitions? Or can we suppose that God would lay upon us any duty which we are incapable of discharging? that He would command us to love Him supremely, unless by some means or other it were in our power to obey Him? No, no! If He commands us to love Him, depend upon it, it is a thing which we *can* do, and which we *must* do.—How, then, is it to be done?

Tim. i. 15.

Now, though it is unquestionably true that we cannot by any mere force of will love any object that we are bidden to love, yet we are not altogether at the mercy of our affections. There is, indeed, a great deal that we can do in the way of disposing and regulating them. For just consider.—Love, we need scarcely say, springs out of knowledge. Unless we have some knowledge of an individual, of his

person, or conduct, or character, either from our own observation, or from the reports of others, to love him is of course impossible. It is the same with everything that engages our attention ; with the arts and sciences, and the various professions and employments of life, which men pursue with such avidity and enthusiasm. And it is the same with respect to God. To love Him, we must first gain some knowledge of his character and excellencies, his wonderful and adorable perfections ; and this knowledge is to be obtained only in the same way as knowledge upon any other subject is to be acquired,—by the application of our faculties to it. Men do not love God, because they do not know Him ; and they do not know Him, because they do not think of Him ; and they do not think of Him, not because they cannot, but because they will not. There is a certain instinctive repugnance to this particular exercise of mind, than which any other is incomparably more grateful. The natural sentiment is that God is a Being to be dreaded and shunned ; that He is an austere master, and his service a hard and joyless service. This is the natural sentiment ; and if this aversion be unresisted, God will never be known by us at all. We may not indeed deny his existence, but we shall be ignorant of his character ; and while ignorant of that, it will be impossible to love Him. Obviously, therefore, this repugnance must be struggled with and over-

come, just as in the case of any other study for which we feel an aversion, but to which it is our duty to devote ourselves. We must direct our thoughts to God. We must study Him not merely in his works, where He is but very dubiously revealed, but in his word; above all, in that clear and luminous revelation of Himself which He has given us in

Gal. i. 15. Jesus Christ, *who is the image of the Invisible God*, and to the earnest contemplation of whom no man ever lent himself, without warming and opening to the inspiration of divine love. Think then of Him; of what He was, and what He did, and how He stooped—stooped from heaven to earth, and for us men, and for our salvation became Himself a man! *Behold the*

John xix. 5. *Man!* Follow Him in His walks of mercy through the land! Mark his kindness and condescension to the ignorant, the outcast, the wretched! See Him feeding the hungry, healing the diseased, comforting the sorrowful, causing *the widow's heart to sing for*

Job. xxix. *joy!* Is He a being to be dreaded and shunned? Follow Him to the garden, and see his agony there! Follow Him to the Cross, and behold Him there, *bearing our griefs, and carrying our sorrows, wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our*

Is. liii. 5. *iniquities, that we by his stripes might be healed!* Fasten your thoughts upon these things! Dwell upon the love of God thus lovingly manifested in Jesus Christ, and then see whether, as you gain clearer and clearer perceptions of his excellencies, the human

heart within you will not begin to be touched with his benignity and to respond to his attractions, and whether, as you begin to know God, you will not also begin to love Him! And all this we can do. Everyone of us has grace enough for this. We can do it just as we can apply ourselves to any other subject; and this we certainly must do, if we would gain that knowledge of God without which it is impossible to love Him.

This we must do, because in no other way is God to be known by us than through that gracious revelation of Himself, which, in his fatherly consideration of our ignorance and incapacity, He has given us in the Gospel. There, indeed, the sunlike effulgence of Infinite Goodness shines forth without a cloud to obscure it; but there only. Elsewhere the shadows are as dark as the lights are vivid. Elsewhere, both in the economy of nature and the course of his providence, *verily, He is a God that* Is. xlv. 15. *hideth Himself. Clouds and darkness are round about* Psa. xcvi. 2. *Him.* So dubious, indeed, and dark, and often so alarming are the determinations and arrangements of his sovereign pleasure; so perplexing the diffusion of rapacity and suffering among all the known varieties of sentient existence; so inexplicable and disastrous the complication and antagonism of evil with good throughout the entire system of things around us, that amid the wild disorders of the world and the universal groanings of creation, it requires

Rev. xv. 8. no little strength of faith to say, *Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne ! Just and true are all thy ways, Thou King of Saints !* Yes : Natural Theology is doubtless a noble and elevating study : but however devoutly it may be prosecuted, it is anything but a satisfactory one. Look, not merely at one class of phenomena, but impartially at them all—the perplexing as well as the plain, the severe as well as the benign, the destructive as well as the beneficent : see God in the whirlwind and the storm as well as in the sunshine and the calm, and the theism of Natural Theology will be found lamentably insufficient for the weakness and wants of our necessitous nature. Pretty, indeed, it may be and plausible, to talk of looking through nature up to nature's God : but when we see how He not unfrequently manifests Himself : when we see the blaze of his lightning, and hear the voice of his thunder ; when He clothes Himself in tempest, and works in the earthquake, the volcano, the pestilence, instead of fleeing to Him as our refuge, we can only tremble and shrink. We want something to strengthen and sustain us under such tremendous manifestations of vengeance and power ; something to assure us that with all his terrible majesty, all that is mysterious and appalling in his works and ways, we may yet confidently approach Him, as children their father, and calmly repose in his goodness and love. But nowhere in the realms of nature is this assurance to

be found ; nowhere but in Christ Jesus !

Your so called philosopher, indeed, naturalist or psychologist, or both, may turn with disdain from all supernatural revelation. He may pretend that in the world without him and the world within, he possesses a mine which he has only to work, in order to be enriched with knowledge adequate to all our necessities. But what is all his wisdom worth ? One comes forth and tells us that God is the soul of the universe, the vital principle of all animated existence. Another, that He is the universe itself, and that we, therefore, as parts of the universe, are parts of God ! Another, with finely analytic eye, can see atoms everywhere, but God nowhere ! Another with imperturbable self-complacency tells us, that though there certainly are scientific grounds for believing in the existence of a God, yet that, as the Author of nature, He is evidently a being of only limited power and of very questionable goodness : that in the creation and arrangement of this world of ours He may perhaps have done the best He could, but that Matter and Force were such unmanageable things, that the system of nature became of necessity, in his hands, the imperfect and clumsy contrivance that we find it ! Another, with a mighty superiority to vulgar prejudice, not merely repudiates the idea of a personal Deity, but tells us that " God " is only a term which man has invented to express his highest

conceptions of power and wisdom and goodness; that "God," therefore, is only a grand abstraction, or grand cluster of abstractions; in short, that there is no such being as God at all! Such are some of the precious results of philosophic speculation and scientific discovery! Far wiser was the poet and philosopher of old, who, when asked what God is, demanded a week to consider it, and then a fortnight, and then a month, and so on, in endless postponement of the impossible solution. Far wiser he than the arrogant despisers of revelation in our own day; for he knew that which *they willingly are ignorant of*, —his blindness and incompetency, and the need in which he stood of light from *the Father of lights*. And this is what we too must know, if we would so know God as to love Him. We must know ourselves, and our spiritual wants and weaknesses, and what we are in relation to God; and then, how gracious and endearing the aspect in which He presents Himself to us in Jesus Christ! For what are we? Sinners, lying under condemnation? *God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*. Are we guilty and polluted? His blood is *a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness*, and there we may wash and be clean. Are we weak and impotent? *His grace is sufficient for us; his strength is made perfect in weakness*. Are we nothing in ourselves? We are *complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power*, and who will be all

2 Pet. i. 5.

James i. 17.

Rom. v. 8.

Zech. xiii. 1.

2 Cor. xii. 9.

Col. ii. 10.

things to them who look for all things in Him. To know what He is, we must know what we ourselves are; and this God has shewn us. He has shewn us to ourselves in the faithful mirror of his word, that seeing what we are, we may look unto Him, and beholding in the fullness of Christ *the kindness and love* Titus iii. 4. *of God our Saviour*, may be won from our enmity, and be reconciled to Him.

Though, therefore, our affections are not in our own power, yet much may be done in this way towards rightly disposing them; and along with this, another thing may be done which will greatly aid it. While thus earnestly contemplating God in Jesus Christ, you can also try to do what Jesus Christ did, and what you know He would have you to do. As you set Him thoughtfully before you and mark the beauty of his example, you can strive to walk as He walked. Whatever the state of your heart, whatever the great object of your love, even without love to God you can still do the things that love to Him would prompt you to do; and wonderful, depend upon it, wonderful will be the reactionary influence upon your own heart and mind. Even without benevolence act benevolently; comfort the sorrowful, shew mercy and compassion to the needy and miserable, deny yourself that you may personally minister to their necessities, and you will soon find your heart suffering strange alteration, and your affections turning gradually and spontaneously

toward God. As love is to operate and evidence itself in obedience, so surely will obedience in its reflex operation tend to elicit love. Endeavour only to tread in the footsteps of Christ, and ere long your heart will begin to burn within you, and you will find to your astonishment that He is walking by your side !

There is no effort indeed that we sincerely make, but He notices and answers it, and compassionately meets our weakness with his strength. And then, in addition to all this, when we know and feel that we ought to love God and yet do not, we can ask Him to enable us to love Him. We can fall down before Him, and beseech Him to reveal Himself to us. We can plead with Him his own promises. We can confess to Him the waywardness and reluctance of our affections. We can go to Him again and again, and say to Him as the Psalmist did, *My soul*
Ps. cxix. 25. *cleaveth unto the dust ; quicken Thou me according to thy word !* Thou biddest me give Thee my heart ; but it revolts from the invitations of thy love, and give it Thee I cannot. But Thou, O God, canst take it ! If Thou wilt, Thou canst take it and make it anew ! Take it then, O Thou all-merciful Father ! It is not worthy thine acceptance, but since Thou condescendest to demand it, take it, and change it, and make it all thine own !

This we can do. Every one of us can do this. And vainly, therefore, do we pretend that we cannot

love God, until this we have done, and have proved the effort vain.

Brethren, we are living under the dispensation of the Gospel, and *the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto us all.* ^{Titus ii. 2.} The thunders and the lightnings have ceased, and the tempest has passed away; and not from Mount Sinai, but from Mount Sion; not as an offended Lawgiver, but as a reconciled Father, God is speaking to us, in *a still small voice,* ^{1 Kings, xix. 12} and by the blood of Jesus. He invites our love by the exhibition of his own. We may turn away our eyes from it if we will. We may stop our ears, and refuse to harken. But our day of grace will ere long be over; and then the thunders will peal again, and again the lightnings blaze, and the voice of law again be heard, not commanding love, but pronouncing condemnation!



PHILIPPI.

ACTS xvi. 30, 31.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

IN this chapter we have an account of the introduction of the Gospel into Europe, and of the success which attended the labours of Paul and his companions at Philippi; success, however, which here, as everywhere else, speedily provoked a fierce persecution. In the house of Lydia, their first convert, they enjoyed a season of security and quiet. The obscure little oratory by the river side, became the scene of their frequent, if not constant, labours, and the auditory soon increased. Men as well as women were attracted to the spot, and *brethren* (as appears from the conclusion of the chapter) were *added to the Lord*. Everything seemed full of encouragement. But they were not suffered long to enjoy this calmness and prosperity. No sooner did they come forth into public, and proclaim the name,

Verse 40.

Acts v. 14.

and manifest the power and mercy of Christ by dispossessing a demoniac, than they were seized and dragged before the magistracy, by whom, without trial or examination, they were sentenced to be cruelly scourged, and then were cast into prison. They were consigned, too, to the custody of a man, who, hardened by the nature and habits of his office, as well as embittered against them by his sympathy with the popular resentment, carried out his orders with merciless severity. He *thrust them into the inner prison*, and then, lacerated and bleeding as they were, proceeded to torture them still further for his own savage gratification. He *made their feet* Verse 24. *fast in the stocks*. Hard and trying change this, from the freedom and comfort of the house of Lydia, to the horrors of a dungeon! But in Milton's noble language :

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

This dungeon in the gaol at Philippi was at that moment the very happiest spot in the whole city, for *at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them*. Sleep, in- Verse 25. deed, we may well believe impossible under the circumstances. Bruised and fettered, fastened painfully by the feet to huge logs of timber, how in such a condition were they to sleep? But that, unable to find rest in sleep they should be able to sing praises—this surely was remarkable. *In the world,*

John xvi. 58 said our Lord to his disciples, *ye shall have tribulation ;* and they had it. But peace he also promised them ; and peace they had, and more than peace. They were filled with the spirit of praise, and a joy which broke forth into singing !

Yes ; persecution might fetter their limbs, but it could not chain their spirit. It might rend off their clothing, but it could not rob them of their faith and hope. It might incarcerate them in a dungeon, but it could not exclude them from the sympathy of their Master, and the comfort of his love. It might shut them up in darkness, but it could not shut out the light of his countenance, and the joy which it inspires. Mangled and bleeding as they were, at midnight they *prayed and sang praises unto God.*

Had we been merely told that they prayed together, we might have thought it only natural and appropriate to such men in such circumstances. **Is**
James v. 18. *any afflicted, let him pray.* But their feelings rose above prayer : or rather their prayers rose into praise, and their praise into singing. There is surely something in this above mere nature.

A mercy it is that there is no place where we may not pray, and hold communion with Christ : that the power and malice of man can never deprive us of that power : that no bars, nor bolts, nor dungeon walls, can keep us away from Him, or Him away from us. But praise is greater than prayer ; and a yet greater mercy it therefore is, that every-

where and in all circumstances we may also praise Him ; may rejoice in him with a joy which can find its only fit utterance in song.

At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises. And doubtless they prayed not for themselves alone, that they might be strengthened patiently to endure ; but, after the precept and example of their Lord and Master, for them also who thus *despitefully used* Matt. v. 44. *and persecuted them.* But they could little anticipate the swiftness with which their prayers and praises would be answered. The answer, however, was at hand ; but it came in a manner the most strange and alarming. It came in the shape of an earthquake.

While they were thus praying and singing, to the astonishment of the prisoners who heard them, suddenly, the earth beneath them began to heave, and the dungeon walls to shake and totter to their foundation. Danger in a new and more appalling aspect seemed to menace them ; trouble and trial, demanding a yet stronger exercise of faith.

How wonderful and mysterious are the ways of God ! In what strange disguises does his mercy sometimes come ! How marvellous that He should manifest his favour and care for his suffering servants in such a form as this ; a form which at first must have shocked them with unutterable dismay ! But it was only a momentary alarm, as brief as it was terrible. The convulsions of the earthquake were such indeed, as immediately to break

Verse 26.

the dungeon bolts and bars, and to burst open the prison doors. Something more indeed than an earthquake, a supernatural hand must have been at work, unchaining the fettered wretches in the gaol; for *every one's bands were loosed*. But so paralyzing was their terror, that none of them had a thought of escaping. Whither indeed were they to flee from those throes and quakings? Their sudden liberty would be even more frightful to them than their bondage. In their cells, therefore, they all remained, chained by fear with fetters strong as links of iron.

The jailor, however, startled by the earthquake out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, naturally supposed that the prisoners had availed themselves of the liberty thus suddenly afforded them: and knowing that his own death would be the penalty for their escape, he drew his sword, and in his desperation would have killed himself. Death by his own hand seemed to him better than death by the hands of others, and the infamy of a public execution: an idea intolerable to his proud Roman spirit. With all the rough brutality of the man, there was still some sense of honour about him—the soldierly feeling, that shame was worse than death; a high, manly pride which could not brook disgrace. But he had nothing else to sustain him; no other principle than just this sense of honour. He may have been a worshipper of the Pagan divinities, but

in such a religion what is there to support a man in trouble? His gods—what could his gods do for him? Nothing; and he felt that they could do nothing; and just because he felt this, he was about to kill himself.

But this sense of honour, this high unbending pride—think of it for a moment, what a poor thing it is! What a fatal contradiction! What a tragical delusion! What a Moloch in fact, when instead of sustaining a man it destroys him!

Suicide, we know, was very common among Greeks and Romans, and no wonder: for in the absence of religious faith, the sense of honour seems in many circumstances almost to demand it. Some of their philosophers, indeed, condemned it; but by the great majority it was approved as the last resort of true heroism. Cicero's name was sullied in their eyes, because he shrank from escaping by suicide out of the hands of his enemies; whereas Cato was held up to immortal honour, because, rather than stoop his proud spirit to grace Cæsar's triumph, he fell upon his own sword. To love life more than honour was deemed the deepest ignominy. Well: and is not death better than shame, and honour more precious than life? Unquestionably it is so. Unquestionably the Christian's honour is to be esteemed by him as more precious than life. But then his honour is something very different from the sentiment of selfish pride. His honour is

identified with his Master's honour, and merges in it. His sense of honour will constrain him to suffer not merely death, but shame itself; to live a life of
 1 Cor. iv. 18. shame; to be treated and trampled on *as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things*; and to
 Acts v. 41. rejoice that he is *counted worthy to suffer shame* for the sake of Him, who, for his sake, *endured the cross,*
 Heb. xii. 2. *despising the shame.* Such is the Christian's sense of honour; and a very different thing it is from that stern and selfish pride which the world calls honour; as different as Christ from Moloch.

Paul's timely interference turned the jailor from his fatal purpose. *Do thyself no harm,* he cried; *for*
 Verse 28 *we are all here.* 'His perfect self-possession—for his alarm would be only the panic of a moment—in some measure restored the man to himself; or rather turned his terror in another direction; for now that he heard that the prisoners were all secure, and that none of them were attempting to escape, he began very evidently to apprehend that some more than mortal power was interfering on behalf of Paul and Silas, and against himself, on account of the outrage he had done them. Calling therefore for a light, he rushed into the dungeon, and trembling with agitation, threw himself at their feet, as men who were specially under divine protection.

Possibly he might have heard something about their preaching, and about the declarations of the demoniac whom Paul had dispossessed, that *these men*

were the servants of the most high God, and that they made known the way of salvation. Perhaps too, he had, in common with the prisoners, heard them singing praises in the night; or, which is probable enough, he might have heard them, while fastening them in the stocks, giving utterance to strange sentiments of piety; calling on Christ for strength and patience, or imploring the divine mercy upon himself, upon his ignorance and hardness. And now all these things rushed together upon his mind; and dreading, therefore, the immediate vengeance of the power that was evidently exerted for them, he brought them out of the dungeon, and passionately besought them—*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* delivered, that is, from that divine wrath which he feared he had provoked, and which seemed threatening him with immediate destruction.

The man's conscience was evidently roused. His soul was stirred up by terror from its lowest depths. The monitor within the breast, which at times tells every man that there is a God, and that that God will judge him, was wakened up. Hence his apprehension of wrath and punishment; his earnest impassioned inquiry, full of the consciousness of guilt, and of the terror which guilt produces—*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*—This seems to be the true history and description of his state of mind. Paul and Silas, he felt convinced, were the messengers of *some* god—what god he knew not, but some

god, very different from the deities of the popular mythology, who was incensed against the whole city, and especially against himself, for persecuting and abusing them. To them, therefore, he tremblingly appealed for direction to escape the vengeance which he dreaded.

And now let us look at the answer they returned to the terrified jailor's appeal. Indistinct and confused as his ideas and feelings were, yet, as a man in deep mental distress, consciously guilty, and vividly apprehensive of divine wrath, they brought him at once and immediately to the Saviour. *Believe, said they, on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

To ourselves this language is sufficiently clear; but to a man, immersed like this jailor in the darkest heathenism, it would, without explanation, be totally unintelligible. Accordingly it is added, *and they spake unto him the word of the Lord.* Briefly it must have been, but clearly—and a happy thing it is that the Gospel of our Salvation needs not many words to make it known, but that it can be clearly and yet briefly proclaimed—they expounded to him their announcement of salvation. They told him who Jesus Christ was, and what He had done for us; how He loved us and gave Himself for us; and what it is to believe on Him; and how, if he believed, he would become another man, and would not only be delivered from all his sins and fears, but

be exalted hereafter to a condition of blessedness infinitely transcending all he could ask or hope for. They thus placed him immediately at the foot of the Cross; they preached to him *Christ crucified*, ^{1 Cor. i. 23.} God's own method of salvation; the grand expression of divine love and mercy to a guilty world: and in bidding him *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*, they bade him cast himself, sinner as he was, absolutely and immediately upon the mercy of God, thus savingly manifested in the sacrifice of Christ.

Observe, however, for a moment, what they did not do. Observe, that they did not plunge into a deep theological exposition of the Trinity in Unity, and tell him that if he would be saved, before all things it was necessary that he should thus think of the Trinity. They did not insist upon *this* as the primary condition of salvation. To say nothing of the alarm and agitation into which the man was thrown by the earthquake—a state of mind not the most favourable for indoctrination into the subtleties of theology—neither in the Epistles of St. Paul, nor in the scripture records of his preaching, is there anything to lead us to suppose that this was his method of meeting the spiritual enquirer, and ministering peace to the troubled conscience. However profoundly he may have discoursed to the advanced believer, however *strong* the *meat* with which he may have fed *them that were of full age*, this certainly was not the *milk* with which he fed *babes* in religion. He ^{Heb. v. 13, 14.}

did not straiten the gate of life by thronging it with
 1 Cor. i. 17. unnecessary obstacles. He did not *with wisdom*
 1 Tim. iii. 9. *of words*, make *the mystery of the faith* still more
 mysterious. He did not obscure the grace and
 mercy of the Gospel by embarrassing it with abstruse
 metaphysical distinctions, and explanations which
 themselves required explaining. Neither did he
 balk the trembling sinner with a mere theory of the
 Godhead in place of the living, loving Saviour; nor
 rest his salvation rather on opinion than on faith,
 on mental acumen rather than on moral disposition.
 Certainly it was not thus that the Apostle himself
 had learned Christ, and as certainly it was not thus
 that he preached Him.

Nor, on the other hand, was it upon the abstract
 goodness of God, or his uncovenanted mercy, that
 they bade him rely; nor yet upon any evidences of
 his loving-kindness that might be gathered from the
 beneficent order and phenomena of nature; but only
 on that peculiar manifestation of his gracious dispo-
 sition towards us which He has supernaturally
 given us in the sacrificial love of Christ, *in whom*,
 and in whom only, *we have redemption through his*
 Ephes. i. 7. *blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of*
his grace. The forgiveness of sins is an act not
 merely of goodness, but of mercy—a special and
 supernatural exercise of the divine goodness; and
 to be warranted in looking for that, we must have
 some special and supernatural ground of hope.

Nor, again, did they promise him salvation upon condition of his penitence, irrespectively of faith in the atonement of the Cross, as if in mere penitence there were some propitiatory virtue: but they directed him out of himself, to *the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,.....that He* Rom. iii. 24.
might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Nor again did they pretend to be able of themselves to do anything efficaciously for his salvation. Apostle though St. Paul was, specially commissioned and marvellously endowed, he did not pretend to the possession of any supernatural grace that qualified *him* to act as Saviour. Whatever his power of absolution, he did not say, Confess thy sins to me, and I will absolve thee from them all. Nor, though he afterwards baptized him upon the confession of his faith in Christ, did he point him to the Sacraments, and tell him that there was some mystical and saving virtue in them. Nor did he hold up to him the Church, and bid him submit himself to the authority of the Church, and he should be saved. Multitudes, we know, pretenders to transmitted grace and apostolical authority, have done so since the Apostle's time: but it was not thus that the Apostle himself acted. No. As with the Corinthians so with this jailor, he delivered to him *first of all that* 1 Cor. xv. 8.
which he also received, how that Christ died for our sins

according to the Scriptures. As a minister of Christ he pointed him simply to Christ, and the salvation that is in Him, *who, of God is made unto us wisdom,*
 1 Cor. i. 30. *and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

Observe also that when the Apostle said, *thou shalt be saved, and thy house*, he did not mean that the jailor's faith would avail for his household as well as for himself; but only that the salvation
 Jude 3. *which is in Christ Jesus is a common salvation*; that it is freely offered to all alike, without respect of persons; that *God so loved the world, that He gave his*
 John iii. 18. *only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Vicarious as was the sacrifice of Christ, and universal as is its redemptive efficacy, it is nevertheless for each to ascertain his own personal interest in it. The faith of the father will avail nothing for the child, nor the faith of the master for the servant. In matters of personal religion nothing can be done by proxy, but
 Philip. ii. 12. *each must work out his own salvation.* And therefore *they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*

And this word of the Lord was exactly what the jailor wanted. Apprehensive of some immediate and terrible infliction of divine wrath, the news of a Saviour, and especially of such a Saviour, a divine Saviour, illimitable in power and mercy, on whose saving grace he had only to cast himself in order to

realize its efficacy—the news of such a Saviour was just the very comfort which his heart demanded. Never before had he felt his guilt; never before been aware of his danger; and now, therefore, that his spiritual sensibilities were touched, now that he felt himself guilty, and trembled under the consciousness of his guilt, he believed in Christ almost as soon as he heard of his salvation. As his understanding and his heart opened to the touches of divine truth and mercy, his fears gradually rose into faith, and he was enabled to *joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he had now received the atonement.* His household too, whose terrors must have been as lively as his own, seem to have welcomed the announcement of a Saviour with equal gladness; *for he and all his were baptized straightway, freely dedicating themselves to Him* who had *redeemed them to God by his blood,* and whose constraining love and mercy they thus solemnly and thankfully confessed.

And he gave evidence of the reality of his faith in Christ, by his penitent and grateful attentions to Christ's ambassadors. Cut to the heart by the thought of his cruelty, and eager to make them all the amends within his power, he took them into his house, *and washed their stripes, and set meat before them,* ministering his utmost for their relief and comfort: and delighting in his *work of faith and labour of love*—a new, strange pleasure to his heart

Rom. v. 11.

Verse 33.

Rev. v. 9.

1 Thess. i. 3.

Verse 24. —*he rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house.*

Thus was the lion turned into the lamb. Thus was the hard stern heart of the man softened, and melted, and changed. And here was consolation for Paul and Silas. Here they would find ample compensation for their suffering. For such a result indeed, gladly would they have submitted to yet grosser indignities, and triumphantly therefore would they rejoice in their tribulations. And this, too, was the meaning of the earthquake. This was the comfort of which the earthquake was to be the harbinger.

Verse 14. There was no earthquake when Lydia was converted under Paul's preaching in the little oratory by the river side. She was no stranger to the name of God, but a spiritual worshipper, a devout proselyte to Judaism; one who cherished the promise of the Messiah, and *was waiting for the consolation of Israel.* **Luke ii. 25.** Earnest, therefore, as she already was after the truth, it needed but the apostolic presentation of the truth to induce her to embrace it. No terrors were necessary to arrest her attention, and commend the Saviour to her acceptance. Her heart opened calmly and gently to the grace of God, even as a flower-bud opens to the sunbeam.

Here, on the contrary, was a man bred up a heathen, depraved by the vices of heathenism, and further degraded and brutified by his occupation: —a most unpromising and seemingly impracticable

subject. Not a man, perhaps, in all Macedonia less likely to become a Christian than he. As well hope to wash the Ethiop white as to change his heart: and perhaps it would have been totally hopeless under ordinary circumstances, and the simple preaching of the Gospel. But God would comfort and encourage his persecuted servants. The very jailor, therefore, in whose fangs they are writhing, and who is luxuriating in their sufferings, shall himself become a trophy of divine grace, and a jewel in their crown of rejoicing. For this however, something more than the Gospel is necessary: the man must be brought to listen to it. But by what means? What means! What is there that God will not do for the honour of his Son, and the comfort of his suffering servants? The man's heart is to be opened only by fear: and terror, therefore, in its most terrific aspect shall assail him. The very earth shall be moved from its foundations. Great Nature shall be shaken out of her course. There shall be a concurrence of phenomena the most ominous and appalling, to alarm his imagination and awaken his conscience, and *prepare the way of the Lord* into that benighted understanding, that dark and stony heart. And yet all this, extraordinary as it was, was still in strictest harmony with the moral agency of the man. It still rested with the man himself to embrace the gospel or to reject it. Divine influence there was, and importunity, but

Isaiah vi. 8.

there was no compulsion in the case. *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*, said the Apostle. But this faith must be the act of the man's own mind and heart. God would do everything else for him. He would supply all the necessary grace : He would work in him *both to will and to do* ; but believe for him He could not, and to compel him to believe would be to do violence to his moral nature. To harken to Paul's preaching, and to embrace the offer of divine mercy, must be the man's own personal and voluntary act. Had He, notwithstanding all this amount of supernatural inducement and heavenly influence, *resisted the Holy Ghost*, and put from him the word of God, his guilt would have been enormously aggravated ; but he might—he might have resisted it all.

There are many who have resisted more : many, who though they have been in jeopardy more alarming even than the jailor's, have come out of it all with hearts and consciences unstirred, or stirred only for the moment, hardened indeed by that which ought to have melted them. The prison-doors of their hearts instead of flying open under the earthquake, have only been more firmly barred and bolted by the shock. Ay : the earthquake, and the tempest, and the fire have passed before them ; and instead of coming meekly to the mouth of the cave to harken to the *still small voice*, they have only hidden themselves more deeply in its recesses. Mercy and menace have been alike in vain. All

the resources of divine grace have been exhausted upon them, and they have defied and resisted them all !

How is it, Brethren, with ourselves ? Are there none among ourselves who are signal illustrations of the truth of this ? Are there none to whom both *mercy and judgment* have hitherto appealed in vain ? Psalm ci. 1. Are there none to whom the sound of the Gospel has become so familiar as to be utterly powerless, except only to harden them in selfishness and sin ; and to whom there would seem to have been given *the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this day ?* It is Rom. xi. 8. a solemn question, not frivolously to be answered or put by, for *what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God ? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ?* 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18. Where !

THE MAN BORN BLIND.

(PART I. *Differences between Christ and his disciples.*)

JOHN ix. 1—5.

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, This man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents : but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day : the night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.”

WHO *did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?* This may seem a strange enquiry for the disciples to make of our Lord, but it was one that naturally resulted from the ignorance and errors of the time. It was a common opinion among the Jews of that period, not merely that sin was the original cause of all our suffering—which it unquestionably is—but that particular calamities were the penal consequences of particular sins, which were thus retributively visited upon the transgressor.

Had the man, therefore, become blind by a sudden or gradual deprivation of his sight, they would have felt no difficulty upon the subject, but would have immediately concluded, that his blindness was at once the sign and the consequence of his own heinous criminality. But as it was notorious that the man was *born* blind, they felt the impossibility of applying this rule to his particular case, unless they supposed that his calamity was a judicial infliction upon him, for guilt contracted in some former state of being. As, however, they were taught both by Scripture and by experience, that the sins of the parents are, in the order of divine providence, often visited upon the children, they were at a loss to determine with whom the criminality lay; and hence therefore the enquiry, *Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?* There was nothing, therefore, strange or unnatural in their curiosity, however extraordinary it may appear to ourselves. The question, indeed, may not improbably have been the topic of frequent disputation among the curious and philosophical in Jerusalem, presenting to them, as it did, precisely one of that speculative difficulties, which, just because they are totally beyond all human solution, prove so irresistibly attractive to the wisdom of this world.

But surely it betrayed a lamentable deficiency in the disciples themselves, that this should be the only

effect which the sight and knowledge of the man's calamity produced upon them. The man was blind. He had been blind from his very birth. He laboured under one of the most grievous privations that can possibly befall our needy nature. From one of the principal sources of earthly comfort and enjoyment he was, and ever had been, completely excluded.

Truly the light is sweet ; and a pleasant thing it is for
Eccles. xi. 7. *the eyes to behold the sun :* but what were these to him ? The cheerfulness of day, the solemn beauty of night, the vastness and variety of creation, the gladness and splendour of the earth and sky, the heavens declaring the glory of God, the firmament shewing forth his handiwork—these things, which, with their sweet harmonious influences, and their rich pregnancy of knowledge and of thought, bring blessedness to every heart—what were they all to him ? Their line went out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world—yet they reached not him ! To him, all nature was a blank. He was *born* blind. The face of father and of mother, the faces that mourned over his infancy, that smiled on him in love, and that melted over him in grief, he had never seen. How many tears had been wept over the sightless babe, the sightless boy ! What unutterable yearnings of love and pity had been felt for this poor child of night and darkness ! And now he had attained to manhood, and, through the lanes and streets of Jerusalem he groped his vacant way,

his manly strength all useless to him, to sit a cheerless mendicant, begging for the alms of the busy passers by. And Jesus sees him, and is arrested by the sight. The disciples also see him: they see him in his darkness and forlornness and poverty; and they are already apprised of his condition and circumstances; they know, too, their Master's mercy and his power: they have beheld Him over and over again give sight to the blind: and yet, instead of being touched with compassion for the friendless wretch; instead of sympathising with the concern which Jesus evidently felt for him, and interceding with him to pour light and joy into those sightless eyes, they can look upon this spectacle of blindness and destitution, and the only effect it produces upon them is the excitement of a vain and impertinent curiosity:—*Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*

Perhaps it was because they regarded his calamity as specifically and directly the punishment of sin, that they exhibited no deeper interest about him. It may be that, thinking they saw upon him the judicial hand of God, they felt as if warned off from compassionating one whom God had thus smitten: as if a criminal, stigmatised so conspicuously as he, was no fit object of pity, but was rather marked out for aversion and avoidance. Supposing it to have been so, (and it is the most charitable view of the case)—yet that the greatest sufferers are not there-

fore the greatest sinners, they might have learned from the afflictions of Job, and the indignation of the Almighty against the three friends of the Patriarch, who, taking precisely this view of Job's calamities, and condemning him as a hypocrite and a deceiver, were themselves condemned for their presumption and censoriousness. Even had the disciples been right in regarding suffering as invariably and specifically penal, yet to look upon the afflicted as objects of aversion, was certainly not a lesson which they had learned from their Master. It was not the lesson He taught them when He sent them forth, *and gave them power to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease.* It was not the moral which his own miracles were calculated to enforce. Very different was the view which He had instructed them to take of such cases. When told *of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, Jesus, answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* In other words—Although it is true that sin is the original cause of all suffering, and that but for sin man would never have been exposed to such fatalities as these, yet

Matt. x. 1

Luke xiii. 1—5.

you are not therefore to regard them as conveying any intimations of personal character, or to imagine that those who fall victims to them are more criminal than those who escape. These dark providences are not to be so interpreted. On the contrary, as suffering is the inevitable consequence of sin, they are rather to be regarded as solemn admonitions of the ruin that must ultimately overtake the impenitent, whatever their present exemption from calamity. *Except, therefore, ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

The cold unfeeling conduct of the disciples, however, may serve to illustrate to us this important truth, that *error is never harmless*. To consider particular calamities as the retributive consequences of particular sins, may seem a very innocent, if not, indeed, a salutary error. Yet labouring under it as they did, it so chilled their sensibilities, that they could look upon a spectacle of distress which moved their Master's liveliest commiseration, and instead of being wrought into sympathy with Him, could be engrossed by a mere feeling of inquisitiveness and curiosity, and coldly and frivolously enquire, in total indifference to the man and his affliction, *Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*

It should also teach us to be less inquisitive about the sins of others than about our own. A mind seriously intelligent and reflective would rather have

enquired, why, if this man is thus visited, am I exempted? Why, since my misdoings are so many and so great, am I the subject of so many blessings? Deal with me after my sins, reward me after my iniquities, and what would be my lot? This very faculty of vision, how have I abused it! *The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,* how have I surrendered myself to their impulses! And what then would be my condition now, were I to be retributively dealt with according to my misdeservings! Oh, from my own innumerable mercies, my own most gracious exemption from calamity and distress, let me learn to pity those to whom, in the exercise of his inscrutable sovereignty, God has allotted a different portion!—To judge ourselves, as an old commentator well observes, is our duty; to judge others is our sin.

One thing we may notice in the conduct of the disciples which may well be commended to our imitation; and that is, their applying for information upon the subject of their doubts to Him who was best able to enlighten them. Well would it be were all men to follow their example, and to repose that faith in his wisdom which they discovered! To how many of the enquiries which agitate and divide mankind, do the Scriptures of truth, and the sayings of our Lord, give a clear and satisfactory answer! How many of those questions which distract the Christian world might be at once decided, were men,

instead of resorting to books of theology and the authority of merely human teachers, to refer them at once to the oracles of God! Upon how many of those subjects that engage the speculative and philosophic enquirer, do the Scriptures pour a flood of that very light which he is so ambitious to discover! God, and his perfections and character: man, and his nature and condition, his relations and duties; the soul, and its immortality, and a future state of everlasting recompence; upon these and other matters of infinite moment, men are still seeking light by methods of their own, just as if life and immortality had never been brought to light by the Gospel; as if *God had not, in former times, spoken to the fathers by the prophets, and to ourselves in these last days by his Son!* Ah! but to learn of Him; to be *taught by Him, as the truth is in Him,* demands a certain meekness and submissiveness of heart and mind, little in keeping with the ambition of your philosopher. He, forsooth, must discover truth for himself, or he will none of it! The sun has risen, and is shining gloriously in the heavens above him, but rather than be indebted to its illumination, he prefers walking by the light of his own miserable taper.


Heb. i. 1.

Ephes. iv. 21.

So much for the conduct of the disciples. Let us now look at the contrast presented to it in the conduct of our Lord.

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind

from his birth. Connect this verse with the last verse in the preceding chapter, from which it ought never to have been separated, and a striking light will be thrown upon the words. We there find that Jesus was escaping from the fury of the Jews, who, exasperated by what they thought the blasphemy of his assertion—*before Abraham was I am*, would have wreaked their vengeance in his blood. His hour, however, was not yet come. To evade their violence, He therefore *hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.* And as He passed by—the word Jesus is not in the original, but has been supplied by the translators in consequence of the interruption of the narrative—*He saw a man which was blind from his birth.* It was, therefore, as He was in the very act of escaping from an imminent peril, that this disconsolate object met his eye; and instantly, in total unconcern about his own personal safety, and in beautiful illustration of his characteristic mercy, his self-sacrificing solicitude for others, his readiness to every good work—instantly he paused. As for the man himself, he in his blindness knew not that Jesus was passing by. Could he but have known it, he might have lifted up his voice and appealed to the Son of David for his mercy; but friendless as sightless, there was no one to apprise him of his opportunity. He saw not Jesus: no, it was Jesus that saw him; and saw him with very different



eyes from those with which he was looked upon by others. The disciples also saw him; but only, as we have observed, to indulge a vain curiosity and an uncharitable surmise. They saw him, and would have passed by. Jesus saw him as he was passing by, and instantly his steps were stayed. To see was, with Him, at once to compassionate and relieve. How justly did He liken Himself to the sun when he said, *as long as I am in the world I am the light of the world!* How much more emphatically may it be said of Him than of it, *there is nothing hid from the* Ps. xix. 6. *heat thereof!* His healing beams are everywhere diffused; but they fall with the kindest warmth upon those that are most miserable. Ah! to be miserable and yet to be unseen; to stand in need of help, and yet have none to pity—this were indeed to heap despondency upon distress, and to sink the heart in utter hopelessness. But let the unhappy know that they are not unseen. Let those *that walk* Isaiah 1. 10. *in darkness and have no light* be told, that their sorrows are not unnoticed and unknown; that though they see Him not, there is One above, not far from every one of us, whose eye, itself no stranger to tears, is ever most attracted by the spectacle of misery. Let them know that He who, when on earth, was sight to the blind, is full of his compassions as ever; and from the light inaccessible in which He dwells, is ready to vouchsafe that vision and that faculty divine, which is *the substance of* Heb. xi. 1.

things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen ; that inward light, by which they may endure as seeing
 Heb. xi. 27. *Him who is invisible, and in whom though now they see*
 1 Pet. i. 8. *Him not, yet believing, they may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

It was Jesus that saw him in his blindness and poverty ; no unapt emblem of our dark and ruined nature, on which He had looked down with like compassion, and in the exercise of the same unsolicited mercy, had left the bosom of the Father, and come to seek, as well as to save. And if any of us are now brought to the experience of his saving power, it is still by the same spontaneous grace.
 Isaiah lx. 1. *Still, as ever, He is found of them that sought Him*
 Rom. x. 21. *not.* Often, indeed, He *stretches forth his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people*, but his hand is stretched forth still ; and if any perish, it is not because He is unable or unwilling to save, but only because they neglect or repudiate his great salvation.

He saw him, and with a purpose full of mercy ; mercy that would not suffer him to continue for a moment under an injurious surmise. *Neither*, said our Lord, disabusing his disciples of their erroneous construction of the case, and shewing them the light in which He Himself contemplated it, and the real significance of all such anomalies in nature and providence—*neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents ; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.* Not, of course, meaning that either

the man or his parents were sinless, but only that his blindness was not a punitive infliction for the sins of either. Distressful as was the man's calamity, it was yet the physical effect of a physical cause. It had befallen him in the ordinary course of nature; for a purpose, it is true, but a purpose very different from that of punishment; for the purpose, indeed, of *making manifest the works of God*.—That our Lord, in thus speaking, had some reference to the miracle He was about to work upon the man, is evident from what immediately follows; but He can scarcely have meant that the man was born blind, merely that he might be the subject of his miraculous mercy. He must surely have also referred to the instruction to be derived from the man's calamity, and the illustration which it shed upon the works and ways of God. True, it afforded our Lord an opportunity of exhibiting his divine power, and the merciful character of his mission among us; but it served other and most important purposes also. As a mere *fact*, occurring in the order of divine providence, it presented them with an awful demonstration of the absoluteness of the divine sovereignty; while as an *anomalous* fact, a startling deviation from the ordinary course of his providence, it read them a touching lesson as to the characteristic benevolence of the system under which God has placed us.

In all ages men have been prone to murmur at the unequal and apparently capricious, distribution

of good and evil, happiness and misery, in this world. Sooner or later, indeed, affliction comes upon all; but it does not happen to all in the same amount, or in the same proportion. Some appear singularly exempted, while others appear singularly oppressed. This man, for instance, was born blind,—and cases of a similarly painful nature are constantly occurring—not accidentally, but in the order of divine providence, to teach us, on the one hand, that He, the Creator and Disposer of all things, *doeth according to his own will, in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth*; that He is under no obligation to distribute his gifts in any invariable order or proportion, but that his own inscrutable wisdom and perfect goodness are the only law of his conduct. When, therefore, we behold Him privileging some and depriving others, making some to honour and others to dishonour, conferring upon each individual such powers and capacities, and means of enjoyment, as, in his wisdom, He sees fitting to bestow, it is that we may humble ourselves beneath his mighty hand, in reverential acknowledgment of his absolute and awful sovereignty. On the other hand, as blindness is a rare privation, and sight a common blessing, we are to behold, in the comparative infrequency of such exceptional calamities, a touching illustration of the largeness of his loving-kindness and beneficence, when with unimpeachable justice, He might,

Dan. iv. 35.

had He so pleased, have reversed the entire order of his providence, and made the power of vision as extraordinary as the want of it is rare. Thus too, since none of us have any meritorious claim upon his bounty, we may admire and adore the exceeding riches of his mercy, in so diffusing amongst us the means and capacities of enjoyment, instead of wondering and murmuring that some should be afflicted.

But the language of our Lord had reference also to the miracle which He designed to perform. If hitherto, the man's blindness had rendered him a conspicuous example of God's awful sovereignty in nature and providence; it was that henceforth he might become a yet more remarkable instance of his wonderful goodness and mercy. Hitherto the sterner and severer of God's works and ways had been made manifest in him, that other men might intelligently reflect upon those of a benigner aspect, of which they were themselves examples. All his life long he had been walking in darkness, that other men, beholding him, might more justly appreciate the inestimable blessings of light and vision. And now the lesson which his sightlessness had been reading to others, it should effectually teach himself. His blindness should enhance to him the blessedness of sight, and his gratitude and joy be all the more profound for his long infelicity in the years that were past. His calamity was Christ's

opportunity, an opportunity on no account to be lost, of evidencing the reality of his divine mission, by working a work which, however exceptional and surprising, was far more strikingly characteristic of Him that sent Him, than any work of judgment however just. He, the Light of the world, would shine into the man's heart as well as into his eyes, and while delivering him from his corporeal blindness, would make it instrumental in developing within him the faculty of spiritual vision. *I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day.* It is by acts of mercy and beneficence that I am to attest my character and mission, and the presence of my Father with me; and while therefore it is day, while the opportunity of beneficence lasts, and as the occasions for beneficence arise, *I must work the works of Him that sent me.*

And thus also it is, Brethren, that we ourselves are to evidence the reality of our Christian character, and the genuineness of our Christian profession; by acting in our Lord's spirit and treading in his steps; by working the works of God while it is day, and according as the means and opportunity are graciously afforded us. And if our eyes have been opened; if the film of that blindness in which all of us were naturally born has been purged away, and we are enabled to discern the loveliness of Christ, and the beauty and excellence of his example; if we have learned any thing of his grace and saving

mercy, we shall be ready on all occasions to imitate his alacrity in doing good. We cannot indeed do the things that He did. We are not gifted with the powers that He possessed. We cannot by simply willing it, give health to the sick, and strength to the lame, and sight to the blind, as He did. But we can manifest the same disposition to do so which He manifested. Though we cannot exhibit his power, we can, at all events, exemplify his spirit. Though we cannot work miracles we can support hospitals. We can exert the means of beneficence with which God has privileged us, however limited they may be; and though we cannot command a blessing, we can at least endeavour to secure one. And rest assured, that if we do not cheerfully exert the ability we do possess, in alleviating the distresses and promoting the welfare of those around us, we should be proportionately as reluctant to exert any higher ability that might be conferred upon us. If we are sparing of the silver and the gold which God has given us, and given us among other reasons, for the very purpose of being distributed in works of mercy, we should be just as niggard dispensers of his bounty were we gifted with miraculous powers. He that is unfaithful in that which is little, would also be unfaithful in that which is greater. But few of us can say, as Peter said to the lame man at the gate of the temple, *Silver and gold have I none; but we may all of us say with him, Such as I have give* Acts iii. 6.

Matt. viii. 17.

1 Pet. ii. 21.

*I thee ; and we may illustrate, too, with the same cheerfulness as he did, the compassionate disposition of Him, who *Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.**



THE MAN BORN BLIND.

(PART II. *Trials of Faith.*)

JOHN ix. 6—7.

“When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam; (which is by interpretation, *Sent*). He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing.”

HE came *seeing*; so that his cure was as complete as it was sudden and surprising. But just consider for a moment how much was included in the miracle; for it was far more than the mere sense of sight which our Lord conferred upon the man, or it could not have been said of him that he came *seeing*.

Sight, the simple sense of sight, is one thing: seeing, as every one acquainted with the nature of vision is aware, is another thing. A new-born babe possesses the sense of sight; but it is some considerable time before it learns to see; to distinguish

objects from each other, and to fix their place. The knowledge, indeed, which is gained immediately by the eye, is merely that of colour and superficial extension. To an unpractised eye all objects seem equally near it. For our perception of distance, of relative position, of solid figure, of real magnitude, and many other qualities in the objects around us, we are indebted to touch, and feeling, and muscular sensation. The hand and arm, the legs and feet, the muscles, the memory, must all of them instruct the eye, or the information furnished by the eye alone would serve only to embarrass and confuse. The act of seeing thus includes not only the perceptions obtained immediately through the eye, but the knowledge previously acquired through other senses: and then, in addition to this, there is the act of the mind associating and combining all these various preceptions thus severally obtained, so that we may comprehend at a glance the object or scene before us. Vision, therefore, with all its apparent simplicity and facility, is really a very complex operation, and most truly has been described as an *art*; the art of seeing things that are invisible. We learn to see; and learn it only by continuous practise and considerable experience. When then we are told that the man went, and washed, and came *seeing*, we perceive that the miracle wrought upon him was not confined to the organic structure of the eye, but that it extended to his intellectual

faculties also, and that in enabling him to *see*, our Lord must have imparted to him at once all that knowledge which, in ordinary cases, is of very gradual acquisition.

But what shall we say about *the means* resorted to by our Lord in the performance of this cure; of the clay with which he anointed the man's eyes, and the direction which he gave him to *go, and wash in the pool of Siloam*? Are we to regard them as actual remedies by which the cure was effected, or were they merely means which He employed to test and elicit the man's faith? Certainly they were the latter, and perhaps, too, they were the former. Adapted though clay may seem rather to destroy sight than to cure blindness, yet He, who at first gave to herbs and minerals their medicinal properties, could with the same ease infuse some mysterious virtue into the very dust of the ground: and He may have done so for the purpose of shewing that the same divine power was working now, which was originally exerted at the creation of all things; and that He, in his omnipotence, was not restricted in the choice of means, but that things the strangest and most unlikely become efficacious when He wills them to be so. But however this may be, they were certainly employed by our Lord as *a test of the man's faith*. Had he not submitted himself implicitly to the will of Jesus; had he shrunk from the application of the clay; or, when directed to go and wash

in the pool of Siloam, had he reasoned as Naaman at first reasoned about the waters of Jordan, and refused to go, his blindness would have been unrelieved. The result was suspended entirely on the faith which he reposed in the power of his compassionate Physician, and it was only as he believed that it was done unto him.

And certainly, under the extraordinary treatment to which he was subjected, the faith of the man was wonderful. Perhaps some sympathising bystanders encouraged him to submission, by telling him that it was Jesus, the great Prophet of Nazareth, who had noticed his affliction. Or he may have overheard the conversation that passed between Jesus and his disciples; and our Lord's sublime declaration, *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*, may have fallen like celestial music on his ear, kindling within him a light, a hope, which he had never known before. Still his faith was wonderful. Without a murmur he submitted, while the strange ointment was spread upon his sightless eyeballs; and without hesitation he obeyed the Saviour's direction. *Go*, said our Lord,—and it would seem to have been all that Jesus said to him—*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam*; and immediately he began to grope his way. *He went, and washed, and came seeing*.

But if his faith was sorely tried, it was magnificently honoured and rewarded. What a dark, black

dungeon of a world had he hitherto been living in ! Into what a bright and glorious world did he find himself suddenly translated ! What a flood of unutterable emotion must have deluged his heart, as he looked up from the waters of the pool into the calm, blue, boundless expanse of heaven above, and on the many coloured earth around him ! How deeply he must have drunk in the blessedness of daylight ! With what astonishment he must have gazed upon the human form and face, the moving multitudes of men and women, the busy streets, the temple's stately pile, and the variety of objects, animate and inanimate, that now for the first time flashed and thronged upon him ! It must have been like passing from death into life. It must have been to him almost like what that great transition will be to ourselves, when, as Bishop Hall says, the scales of mortality fall from our eyes, and we exchange this lower scene of creation for the splendours and blisses of the upper world. It was a vision that must have absolutely overwhelmed and crushed him, had not He who enabled him to see, strengthened him also to sustain the sight.

He came seeing ; and longing, doubtless, to see and to know the generous benefactor who had done such great things for him : to shew Him how complete was the cure wrought upon him, and joyously to offer Him the tribute of his gratitude.

But his trials were not over yet. He had to pass through much before he saw Him again ; and there was a mercy yet in store for him, greater even than the mercy which had already been shewn him, and for which *trial* was necessary to prepare him.

How often does it happen that those who are eminently the objects of divine favour, are on that very account the special objects of human disfavour ! The compassion which Jesus had shewn to this poor blind mendicant, immediately provoked against the man a storm of persecution. A prodigious sensation would of course be produced when the marvel became known. His neighbours and acquaintance would be staggered with astonishment, when they found him in sudden and perfect possession of his eye-sight. Some indeed, as was very natural, almost doubted his identity ; for there was not only the altered aspect of the man to perplex them, but the unaccountableness of the fact itself. How could such a thing be ? Who, in all the world, had ever heard of such a thing before ? By what new and unimaginable means could a cure so wonderful have been effected ? Nothing could be more natural than all this astonishment and curiosity : but that it should be all so cold, so heartless, so ungenerous, so unsympathising ; that when the man simply and frankly told them his wonderful story, no devout admiration should

have been expressed, no solemn enquiry suggested, no sentiment of awe, no apprehension of the divine awakened within them; but that, when they heard that it was Jesus that had wrought this surprising cure, their prejudices should be so inflamed that they should hurry the man off to the Pharisees, and expose him to the malevolence of the Sanhedrim—this was scarcely to have been expected. But it is only another example of the utter inadequacy even of the clearest evidences and the strongest facts to affect a heart, which the spirit of the world has possessed and hardened.

But now the man stands before these saintly Pharisees, and to them he has to tell his tale. *It was the Sabbath-day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.* Immediately that they were apprized of this, they were roused to indignation at such a monstrous profanation of the sanctity of the Sabbath. *This man, they decided peremptorily and at once, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath-day.* Instead of immediately recognizing *the finger of God* in such a palpable exhibition of omnipotence and mercy, they discerned only a manifestation of evil. Instead of being touched by the moral congruity of the deed with the day, the becoming and beautiful association of piety to God and beneficence to man, they saw in it only a technical offence: a violation not of the spirit—that would have been nothing in their eyes—but

Verse 14.

Verse 16.

Luke xi. 29.

of the letter, the exaggerated letter of the law. Profoundly reverential of ceremony and form, their sympathy for suffering was all lost in their indignation at the enormity of the technical transgression. Mercy indeed in their sanctimonious eyes lost all its essential goodness, and became an offence against the God of mercy, unless exerted in strict compliance with their conventional proprieties.

Among them, however, were some of a different mind ; some who were not so warped by prejudice, and upon whom, therefore, the man's statement produced a very different impression. Struck by the beneficence, as well as by the supernatural character of the cure, they hesitated before pronouncing condemnation, and apprehensively enquired, *How can a man that is a sinner do such*
Verse 16. *miracles ?* A question too pertinent to be lightly put aside. A question that brought the most peremptory to a pause. The man, therefore, was interrogated again, and asked what opinion he had himself formed of the person who had opened his eyes ; and the man, inspired by his gratitude with an admirable fearlessness, boldly avowed his conviction that he must be a prophet. He must be, that is, in some close connection with God. He must be clothed with divine authority, and discharging a divine commission. Though he knew not as yet that Jesus was the Messiah, he felt that God alone could have gifted Him with power

and a spirit so beneficent and godlike. Ay, and the Pharisees would have felt it too, had they not already made up their minds to a different conclusion; a conclusion to which they were determined to adhere until it should be no longer tenable. But to what pitiable shifts were they driven in their anxiety to evade the truth! They wanted, if possible, to get rid of the miracle altogether: it was necessary therefore to throw discredit upon the fact of the man's previous blindness. Accordingly, though nothing could be more clear and decisive than the man's own testimony, they yet affected to disbelieve it, and refused to allow it any force at all, until corroborated by that of his parents. The evidence of his parents, however, so far as it went, though from fear of excommunication they were reluctant witnesses, served only to increase their embarrassment by establishing the reality of the miracle, and even constraining their admission of it. Ay, but let truth be unwelcome, let it but offend some cherished prejudice, and rejected it must be, no matter how. Foiled by the man's parents, unable to shake his own statement in even the smallest particular, unable any longer to deny that a wondrous work of mercy, totally beyond all human power, had been wrought upon him, they bid him ascribe to God alone the glory of the cure, whilst at the same time they maliciously endeavour to check the gratitude and admiration with which

Verse 18.

his heart was overflowing, by vilifying and denouncing his kind benefactor as a man notoriously wicked. *Give God the praise*, said they, *but this man we know to be a sinner*. But their hypocrisy was too transparent to cloak their malice, and hence the cutting sarcasm of his retort—*Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was*

Verse 24. *blind, now I see*. What Jesus had done for him spoke for itself. Explain it as they might, they never could explain it away. Revile Him as they would, they could not, with all their malignity, make Him other than He was; and what He was his work declared. Intrepidity so admirable could only provoke a fresh burst of persecution; and accordingly they return to the charge, and in the forlorn hope of ensnaring him in some inconsistency which they might lay hold of to his confusion, they demand of him again, *What did he to thee? How*

Verse 26. *opened he thine eyes?* It was a spasm of weakness and utter perplexity, which the clear sightedness of an honest mind instantly detected. *I have told you already*, he answered, *and ye did not hear: wherefore*

Verse 27. *would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples?* Intolerable effrontery even to hint at such a possibility! *Thou art his disciple*, they indignantly exclaimed. Thou art his disciple; and it is of such base beings as thyself that his disciples consist; *but we, the authorised expounders of the Law, we are*

Verse 28, 29. *Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses;*

*as for this fellow, this upstart, this miracle-monger, we know not whence he is. Ay, but it was a fatal mistake into which their irritation had hurried them: a fatal mistake to throw aside the cloak of authority, and to enter into argument with the man. It gave him instantly an advantage over them of which he admirably availed himself in an unanswerable exposure of their injustice and dishonesty. They acknowledged the divine authority of Moses because of the miracles by which his mission was attested: yet here was a miracle as remarkable as any that Moses had performed, and they would allow it no significance at all! Poor, therefore, as he was and despised, it was with wonder and concern that he looked upon them and replied, *Why, herein is a wonderful thing that ye know not from whence he is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes! Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth. Since the**

Verse 80—83.

world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind! If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. Precisely our Lord's own argument in reply to the cavils of the unbelieving Jews; and one which the modern disparagers of his miracles as evidences of the reality of his divine mission would do well to ponder:

John x. 25.

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of Me. If I do not the works of my Father believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe not me,

John x. 87.

believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him.

To a remonstrance so truthful and spirited what could they reply? But bigotry when it cannot reason can revile, and malice has its weapons always ready. Baffled and beaten on every side, stung to the quick, and writhing in their impotent wrath, they take refuge under the cloak of authority again, and in the abjectness of their spirit fling the man's affliction in his face! They reproach him with his blindness as nature's own stamp and brand of baseness, and spurn him contemptuously from their presence. *They said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.* Happy for him! They might cast him out of the synagogue, they might excommunicate him from their church, but they could not exclude him from the compassion of that Gracious One, who had already, and without solicitation, vouchsafed him such a wondrous
 Verse 34. mercy. *Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and He hastened to him to complete the work He had so graciously begun, and to reveal Himself more fully to the man's well-tried faith.* The persecution through which he had passed had prepared him for such a revelation. He had braved the frown of the Sanhedrim; he had triumphantly vindicated his unknown Benefactor from the blasphemous aspersions of the Pharisees;

he had cheerfully submitted to the worst infamy they could fasten upon him rather than deny Him ; and was ready to acknowledge Him not merely as a prophet, but more than a prophet ; as the very Messiah of God, if such He should declare Himself. Jesus therefore found him : *and when He had found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God ? Dost thou believe in the Messiah of promise ? Dost thou look for his coming ? And art thou ready to embrace Him when He shall be manifested to thee ? Dost thou believe on the Son of God ?*

That voice ! That voice ! Could he fail to recognize the tones of that kind and generous voice, which had bidden him in his blindness, *Go, and wash in the pool of Siloam ?* Surely they must still have been vibrating in his memory, and would vibrate on for ever ! His heart must still have been thrilling with them : and now he hears them again ! *Dost thou believe on the Son of God ?* Oh, now that he could see, how earnestly would he gaze on the countenance of Him who thus accosted him ! How intensely would he *look* the eager enquiry, *Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him ?* And Verse 36. oh ! what must have been his feelings when he heard the astounding reply—*Thou hast both seen* Verse 37. *Him, and it is He that talketh with thee !* What could he say but, *Lord, I believe ?* What could he Verse 38. do, but fall at his feet, and *worship Him ?*

Comment upon this would only injure the effect

of it. Let us look then at the solemn lesson which our Lord derives from the whole transaction.

Verse 39. *For judgment I am come into this world, that they*

which see not might see, and that they which see might be

made blind.—Language purposely enigmatical in

order that it might be more seriously revolved.

Infinitely merciful as was the intention of Christ's

coming—for God sent not his Son into the world

John iii. 17.

to condemn the world, but that the world through

Him might be saved—yet in numberless cases

the effect is anything but correspondent with the

intention; and it is of the effect, not of the

intention, that He thus speaks. Just as when

He elsewhere warned his disciples—*Think not that*

Matt. x. 84. *I am come to send peace upon earth: I came not to send*

peace but a sword. Strange language for Him who

Eph. ii. 14. *is our Peace, and the Prince of Peace,* to hold! But

Isaiah ix. 6. *thus it is that the evil heart of unbelief within us*

Heb. xii. 12. *turns our blessings into curses, and that the things*

Psa. lxi. 22. *which should have been for our wealth, become unto us*

an occasion of falling. Thus, too, it is that the

prediction of the aged Simeon, as he held the

infant Saviour in his arms, has in every age re-

ceived its fulfilment—*Behold, this Child is set for*

Luke ii. 84. *the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for*

a sign to be spoken against, that the thoughts of many

hearts may be revealed.

Ah! there is a far sorer evil than corporeal blindness, heavy as that affliction is: the blindness of the

heart, the blindness of the mind, that dimness of vision to things eternal and divine, which is natural to us all, though it is not all that are conscious of it. *Open Thou mine eyes*, prayed the Psalmist, *that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!* He felt his darkness and longed for light; and humbly and earnestly, therefore, he turned to the source of all spiritual illumination, that the film might be purged from his eyes, and that he might see what otherwise would have been all invisible to him. And so with ourselves; even the most knowing and discerning among us are but dim-sighted after all, and as yet see only obscurely and confusedly, like that other blind man whose sight Jesus mercifully restored, and who at first *saw men as trees, walking*. From this dimness of spiritual vision none can deliver but He, *the Light of the world*, who came into the world for the very purpose, as He says, *that they which see not might see*. None therefore need any longer walk in darkness, for it is not in Him to be unfaithful to his mission. All that would see may see, if only, confessing and deploring their darkness, they cast themselves upon his compassion with the blind man's prayer, *Lord, that I may receive my sight!* *Receive thy sight*, will be the gracious answer. The veil will be removed from their hearts; the eyes of their understanding will be enlightened; *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* will shine into

Ps. cxix. 18.

Mark viii. 24.


Luko xviii. 41.

2 Cor. vi. 6.

2 Cor. iii. 18.

their hearts ; and *with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord*, they will be gradually changed *into the same image, from glory to glory.*

But as He came into the world *that they which see not might see*, so, on the other hand, did He also come *that they which see might be made blind.* While there are those who, painfully conscious of their want of sight, repair humbly to Him to open their eyes, there are others—the self-wise, self-enlightened, self-sufficient—so blind as to be insensible of their blindness ; so blind indeed, as to think that they see, and even to pride themselves upon the strength and clearness of their vision. All the succour, therefore, that He might render they disdain, confident as they are that they themselves are *guides of the*
 Rom. ii. 19. *blind, and a light of them which are in darkness !* What, however, it is that they see, or what the light they have to supply, what truth they have discovered, or what new method of discovering truth they have invented, is hard to say, when, with all their abstruse and elaborate reasoning, all their parade and pomp of philosophy, their highest achievement is to argue all truth and certainty away, and launch us upon an infinite ocean of doubt.—What that light is worth which leaves us in such darkness, or what that vision is worth which cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood, Christ and Belial, we need not, Brethren, trouble ourselves to appraise.
 Prov. xxvi. 12. *Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit ? There is more*



hope of a fool than of him. No blindness is so hopelessly incurable as that of those who flatter themselves that they see, and who therefore *put darkness* Isaiah v. 20. *for light, and light for darkness.* To such an everlasting *woe* attaches. For them *the Sun of Righteousness* Mal. iv. 2. has arisen in vain, and shines only to light them to destruction.

For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind. So it ever has been, and so it ever will be. *Surely He scorneth the scorers, but He giveth* Prov. iii. 34. *grace unto the lowly. The meek He will guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach his way. With the* Ps. xxv. 9. *pure Thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew Thyself froward.* Those who love dark- Ps. xviii. 26. *ness rather than light,* He will leave to the darkness John iii. 19. which they love. But all who come humbly and earnestly to Him, to be *taught by Him the truth as it* Ephes. iv. 21. *is in Him*—upon them He will *lift up the light of his* Ps. iv. 6. *countenance, and in his light they shall see light.* Ps. xxxvi. 9.

THE MISSION OF MOSES.

Exodus iii. 9, 10.

“The cry of the children of Israel is come unto me, and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt.”

EVERY nation has had its great men and heroes whose memory it proudly cherishes; but with the single exception of Him, whose name *is above every name*, the annals of the world may be safely challenged to produce a name that matches with that of the great Leader and Lawgiver of Israel. Whether as warrior, legislator, author, or man, his fame is as fresh and familiar to-day, as it was when it made all Egypt tremble, centuries beyond three thousand years ago; not a leaf of his laurel faded! The earliest of historians, his wonderful narrative is, and as long as the world shall last will continue to be, at once the lore that childhood delights in, and the profound study of the lettered and the sage.

While as a poet, his lyrics are not confined to earthly voices, but are echoed by the church triumphant above, who sing *the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb*. But thus it is with those whom God delights to honour and exalts to fame. Their renown is not limited to time or place; but like the universal voices of the day and night, *their sound goes out into all lands, and their words to the ends of the world*. Rev. xv. 3.
Ps. xix. 4.

From his very birth he seemed marked out for an extraordinary career. He was born at the period when the Israelites were groaning under the ruthless oppression of Egypt; and it was only his singular beauty as an infant that saved him from the barbarous decree, which, like the dragon in the Apocalypse, stood ready to devour the man-child as soon as it was born. But the mother's heart yearned over her babe; *and when she saw that* (to use his own language) *he was a goodly child*, she seemed to discern in his almost preternatural beauty, something like a divine intimation of an extraordinary destiny. Under this impression *she hid him three months*; hid him till it became hopeless any longer to conceal him; and then, painfully struggling between her faith and her fears, she cast him on the care of the Great Being who had moulded his features to such exceeding loveliness. *She took for him an ark of bulrushes, and put the child therein, and laid it among the flags by the river's brink*. Rev. xii. 4.
Ex. ii. 2.

and then stationed his sister at a distance, to see *what would be done to him*. The beauty which had inspired the mother with courage touched also the heart of Pharaoh's daughter, who, coming to the river to bathe, *saw the ark among the flags, and sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the babe wept. The babe wept; as if under the sense and hopelessness of utter desertion. Its tears and sobbings seemed full of a sentiment beyond infancy. The babe wept, pitiful tears, that appealed to her woman's heart with a plaintiveness impossible to resist. She had compassion on him, and child of the Hebrews though he was, she determined to spare his life, and to bring him up as her own adopted son. The sister, who had been witness of the scene, now stepped forward, and offered to call one of the Hebrew women to nurse him: and the maid went, and called the child's mother. And thus the infant outcast, the child of an enslaved and degraded race, was rescued from destruction and restored to the arms of its mother, to be nursed up by her as one of the princes of the land of Egypt.*

This is all that we learn from Moses himself concerning the first forty years of his life, and almost all that is to be gathered from the Scriptures. St. Stephen, indeed, in his defence before the Sanhedrim says that *he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and*

Acts. vii. 22.

deeds: not that he was remarkable for eloquence, for he himself tells us that he was *slow of speech, and of a slow tongue*; but that he displayed great ^{Ex. iv. 10.} capacity for command, and was distinguished for his sagacity in council, and for the wisdom and vigour which he exhibited in the administration of affairs. Doubtless, however, he would during his childhood be carefully instructed by his mother in all she herself knew of the history of her people, and of the divine promises to Abraham and the fathers. Her own faith, strengthened as it must have been by the wonderful providence that had preserved him, she would be anxious to communicate to her son, so as to secure him from the debasing influences of Egyptian superstition. She would draw out his own sympathies for the suffering tribes of God's own chosen people. She would instill into his heart her cherished presentiments of his future greatness, and would endeavour to develope his mind and form his character by the principles and feelings by which she was herself actuated.

The solitudes of the devoted mother were not lost upon her son. Arrived at maturity, the faith and presentiment in which he had been brought up, began vigorously to manifest themselves. *When he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit* ^{Acts viii. 28.} *his brethren the children of Israel.* He had long been aware of the oppression under which they suffered,

and indignant at the thought of their slavery and degradation, he determined to attempt their emancipation. Hitherto he had not been identified with them. He had been separated from them by his rank and station as one of the royal family, and had lived remote from the scene of their sufferings. But now he resolved to visit them, and personally to inspect their condition. He would ascertain their temper and disposition, and see whether they were willing to accept him as their leader, and to array themselves under his command.

It is to this that the Apostle alludes when he says that *by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.* Accustomed though he was to the splendours of royalty, and in a situation to command all the resources of Egypt, yet believing them to be God's chosen people, he preferred the honour that cometh from God to all that is captivating to a worldly ambition, and nobly resolved at the sacrifice of all his dignities and distinctions, to cast in his lot with theirs, and identify himself with them at once and for ever.

He soon found, however, that they were not yet ripe for emancipation, and that he himself was just as unprepared to be their deliverer. He saw one of his poor over-burdened brethren maltreated by an Egyptian taskmaster; and instantly his Hebrew

spirit rose ; and taking his injured brother's part, he fell upon the slave-driver and killed him. He himself informs us of the fact, and he confesses too the caution and the cunning with which he acted. He tells us that *he looked this way and that way*, to be sure that he was unobserved ; *and when he saw that* Ex. ii. 12. *there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.* The commentators upon Scripture for the most part endeavour to justify his conduct by attributing it to a divine impulse ; but do not let us, Brethren, be misled by their lack of discrimination. It is not in this way—this timid, distrustful, clandestine, under-hand manner, that a man acts when he is moved by the Spirit of God. It was not in this manner that Samuel acted, when he *hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.* It was 1 Sam. xv. 88. not in this manner that Elijah acted, when he put *the prophets of Baal* to the sword. It was not in 1 Kings xviii. 40. this manner that Moses himself acted, when really armed with the divine authority. Very different was the spirit he displayed when, forty years afterwards, he went boldly in unto Pharaoh, and delivered his commission, *Thus saith the Lord, let my* Ex. viii. 1. *people go that they may serve me !* Then he did not fear the wrath of the king, because he knew that God had sent him, and felt that God was with him. But now, however pure his disinterestedness and public spirit, he was evidently anticipating his commission. His feelings were, no doubt, all alive for God's

afflicted people, and something within him seemed to tell him that he was destined to be their deliverer; but he mistook, as right-meaning men have often mistaken, the force of his own enthusiasm and the eagerness of his own desires for the finger of Providence, and the impulses and urgencies of divine inspiration. And thus it was that the very thing by which he expected to commend himself to the confidence of his brethren, led them to reject his interference. *He supposed, says St. Stephen, that they would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: he supposed, that is, and believed that God designed to deliver them by his hand; and he expected that they would regard this act of his as a proof that God had sent him for this very purpose; instead of which, they regarded it as the indication of a temper and spirit to be feared rather than trusted. They feared that, submitting to his command, they should only be changing one tyrant for another; and when, therefore, the day following he interposed between two of them as they strove together, and remonstrating with him that did the wrong, said wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? he was repulsed with the indignant demand, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian?—A repulse which produced an immediate and decisive change in all his feelings and purposes. Upon hearing this he became alarmed for his own safety. He feared, and*

Acts viii. 25

Ex. ii. 13.

Ex. ii. 14.

said, surely this thing is known. All his confidence and courage forsook him ; and without attempting any further experiment of their disposition, without risking the possibility of a second repulse, he fled from Egypt to avoid the wrath of Pharaoh.

He fled, but, let it be observed, without making any effort at a reconciliation with the offended monarch. That seems never to have entered his thoughts. He had renounced at once and for ever all connection with the court. His brethren had rejected him, but he would not repudiate them. A Hebrew of the Hebrews, he would still be one with them ; and seeing therefore in the fears that overcame him, as well as in the repulse which he had suffered from them, a proof that he had been premature and criminally hasty, he persisted in his determination to leave Egypt, and went for refuge into the land of Midian. But he went *in faith* : in the faith that the divine promises would be infallibly fulfilled, and that if he were indeed to be the Liberator of Israel, God would make the way plain before him, and prepare both himself and the people, each for the other ; the one to command, and the other to obey.

And both had much to learn. For both severe discipline was necessary. For them, with their abject, slavish spirit, long years of bondage more galling even than that under which they already groaned, to bring back to their memory

the God of their fathers, and constrain them by the pressure of intolerable distress, to cry unto Him for deliverance; and for himself, with his princely pride and impetuous spirit, disappointment, and sorrow, and rugged reverses; retirement, and solitude, and devout self-communion; that he might learn humility and meekness and wisdom, and the art of governing others by learning to govern himself. And for this the whole prime of his manhood must be spent in the school of adversity. Like *the Captain of our salvation* of whom he was a type, he must be made *perfect*, must be accomplished for his work, *through sufferings*. For full forty years, therefore, he continued a sojourner in Midian; *a stranger*, as he calls himself in language full of pathos, shewing how keenly he felt his exile, *a stranger in a strange land*. Forty years! a long, long parenthesis even in a life of a hundred and twenty years. Forty years! during which the hopes and ardours that had once inspired him would languish and gradually die away, and he would be forced to the conclusion that his early presentiments were fallacious; that he had mistaken his destiny; that the peaceful obscurity of a shepherd's life was to be his perpetual lot, and that though the divine promises to Abraham that his seed should possess the land of Canaan would sometime be fulfilled, yet that another, and not himself, was to be the deliverer of his people.

Heb. ii. 10.

Ex. ii. 22.

Such certainly would seem to have been his feeling from the astonishment and reluctance which he manifested, when at length his commission was actually given him.

He was tending his flock at the foot of Mount Horeb, when his attention was caught by the sight of a burning bush: a thing which, under the fervours of an Arabian sun, might not perhaps be uncommon; but as he looked, expecting it to be speedily devoured by the fierceness of the flame, he saw to his astonishment that not a leaf was shrivelled—*The bush burned with fire, and the bush* Ex. iii. 2. *was not consumed*—a lively emblem of the state of his own people at the time, *persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed.* 2 Cor. iv. 9. Struck with a spectacle so extraordinary, and approaching to examine it more closely, he heard a voice from the midst of the bush, calling him by his name and forbidding his further advance. It was the voice of God. It was the Eternal Word addressing him, and declaring himself *the God of his father, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*, the God of the covenant made with them. *And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters, for I have known their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them. Come now, therefore, and I—I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest*

bring forth my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt. As much as to say, what thou didst before, thou didst in the hastiness of thy spirit, unsent, unauthorized by Me. My time was not then come. It is come now. Thou art thyself fitted for the work, and the people are fitted to receive thee. *Now therefore come, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh.* Now thou shalt go, clothed with *my* commission, armed with *my* authority.

Such was the manner in which he was at length inaugurated into an office, which in earlier life he had been eager to undertake, but from which now, that he was far better qualified for it, by maturity of wisdom and experience, he shrank with the utmost humility and reluctance. *Who am I, said he, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?* Striking alteration surely! All his old aspirations and presentiments forgotten, or discarded as foolish and presumptuous! He was just as diffident and retiring now, as he was rash and self-confident before; and still hesitated, and argued, and objected, and hung back, till the fiery bush blazed forth with angry threatening flames, and he dared no longer disobey. But to such a temper must he be reduced. Thus completely must he be emptied of self, and be made sensible of his own incapacity and nothingness, in order that he might *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

Such is the light in which this remarkable portion of Scripture history presents itself to our mind. And now, in deducing from it two or three lessons for our own practical instruction, let us observe in the first place, the fidelity and punctuality with which the divine promise was fulfilled.

In the promise to Abraham that his seed should possess the land of Canaan, it was expressly declared that *for four hundred years* they should be *strangers in a land not their own*, and that they should fall into a state of servitude and affliction, from which at the expiration of the four hundred years, they should be brought forth triumphantly, *with great substance*. Gen. xv. 18. Four hundred and thirty years had elapsed since this promise was made, and four hundred years since the birth of Isaac, the promised seed; and throughout the whole of this period, whether in Canaan or in Egypt, they had been merely strangers and sojourners in the land. They had sunk too into the slavery predicted for them, and were groaning under the oppression of a merciless tyranny. And now the hour of their predicted emancipation was at hand; but in what quarter was there discernible the faintest glimmer of the approaching deliverance? All around was darkness, the very blackness of darkness. God seemed totally to have forgotten and forsaken them. True; they had multiplied and increased exceedingly, so that they almost filled the land; but they were without union,

without strength, without spirit; to all appearance as abject in mind as they were in condition. Bitter as were their lives through their hard bondage, they endured it without an effort, or a thought of resistance. Even the cruel decree consigning every male infant to immediate destruction had been ineffectual to rouse them. Not a single heroic soul among them all, to stir them up against the tyranny! Broken and crushed in spirit, they could only sigh and cry by reason of their bondage. Did any of them ever advert to the divine promise to Abraham, it would probably sound in their ears like an idle tale, a romantic legend of the olden time. Yet they were not forsaken; they were not forgotten. God was working for them all the while; whetting his sword; training and disciplining them, and training and disciplining, in the wilds of Arabia, a despondent shepherd to be their Leader and Deliverer, their Pastor and their Prince. As the darkness deepened the dawn drew near. True to his promise even as the sun to the moment of his rising, the hour came, and with the hour the man. The babe that had been drawn out of the river, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, the impetuous spirit that had been so eager to anticipate the divine commission, the disappointed fugitive from Pharaoh's wrath, the voluntary exile in the land of Midian, after long years of absence suddenly re-appears among them, tamed, softened, subdued,

matured: humbled into the meekest of men, sublimed into the noblest of heroes; and the throne of Egypt shakes beneath his peremptory challenge,—*Thus saith the Lord, let my people go that they may serve me!*

So it was, ay, and so it is: is now, and ever shall be. *He is faithful that hath promised.* He pro- Heb. x. 23.
mised his Son to the world; and when the fulness of the time came, He sent Him forth. He has promised the world unto his Son; and when the fulness of that time shall arrive, He will give Him *the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth* Ps. li. 8.
for his possession. He has his own *set time* to favour Ps. cii. 13.
Zion, and when his set time comes, that favour He will shew, and Zion shall *arise and shine.* He will Is. lx. 1.
make his church the glory of all lands, and *all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.* Is. lli. 10.
Gloomy and cheerless as the prospect may seem, we are not to be dismayed by evil men and evil times. Impotent as the church may seem; and formidable as may seem the dominance of evil and the activity of error, we are not to despond of God's own cause. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.* Our faith and patience may be severely tried, Zech. iv. 6.
but *the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some* 2 Pet. iii. 9.
men count slackness. *The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not* Hab. ii. 8.
tarry. It is not, indeed, for us to know the times and

Acts i. 7. *the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power :* but it is our comfort to know that in his own power they are, and that if we cannot accelerate, so neither can we retard them. Let the hour come, and the man will not be wanting.

The man, we say ; for observe in the next place, that as the power is divine, so the agency must be human. The God of Israel might have emancipated the chosen people at once, by a simple act of his volition. Or He might have sent an angel for their deliverance, and cherubim with flaming swords might have headed their march out of the house of bondage. But He graciously determines that man shall do the work, and He manifests Himself therefore to Moses in the wilderness, and bids him go and stand before Pharaoh. Such is the general order of his providence. Is man to be enlightened with a revelation of his will ? A man is inspired to give utterance to the divine mind ; and so the shepherd is called from his flock and the herdman from his cattle, and divinely schooled into an oracle of God. Is Humanity to be delivered from the ruin of the Fall ? *The Man Christ Jesus comes—the Son of Man, to seek and to save that which was lost.* Is death to be abolished and the grave despoiled ? *Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.* Is the Gospel to be preached to every creature ? Angels might exult in the commission, but man is to be the bearer of the glad tidings ; and

1 Tim. ii. 5.

Luke xix. 10.

1 Cor. xv. 21.

fishermen are therefore called from their nets, and converted into *fishers of men*. Is the devout Cornelius to be brought to the knowledge of Christ? An angel speeds down from the court of heaven, not Matt. iv. 19. however to preach the Gospel to him, but to bid him send for Peter, who shall *tell him words whereby he and all his house shall be saved*. Such is the benignity and grace of God. What need has He of our ex- Acts x. 14. ertions? He *who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, has but to speak the word, and all the vices and miseries of mankind would imme- 2 Cor. iv. 6. diately disappear. But no: He has determined that man shall be the organ of his benevolence to man, and that by man's instrumentality his designs shall be accomplished. Thus it is that He has magnified us; and set his heart upon us. He has condescended to make us in a manner necessary to Himself—to the diffusion of his goodness, and the illustration of his glory: and as without Him we can do nothing, so neither without us will He do anything. Think of it, and you will feel that on earth there can be no nobler motive, even as in heaven there can be no higher honour.

Observe, further, that in the order of divine providence, the way to glory lies through suffering. It was so with the Israelites, and it was so with Moses. It is so with a nation, and it is so with an individual. For the Israelites it was necessary in order effectually to disgust them with their residence

in Egypt: to destroy their mutual animosities, and to cement their political and social union. No one can read their history without seeing that they were deeply contaminated with the superstitions of Egypt: that they were enervated by its vices, and were sunk into a depraved and degraded race. In no other way can we explain their abject submissiveness and impotent lamentations under such a grinding tyranny, when in mere numerical strength they had become so powerful as to excite the jealous apprehensions of the reigning Pharaoh. Suffering, intense and prolonged, became absolutely necessary to rouse their fallen spirit, and reconcile them to emigration from a country in which they had formerly been so prosperous, and where prosperity they hoped might visit them again. It was equally necessary for Moses himself, to discipline him to that patience and self-command, that *meekness of wisdom*, which was requisite for the leadership of a people so perverse and refractory. But are these extraordinary cases? Where is the nation that ever rose to greatness except through agonizing conflict and protracted suffering? Or where is the man that, even humanly speaking, ever became great through any other process? It is so in the secular life, and it is so in the spiritual life. Look at any of the great characters in Scripture, and see how they were tried. Look at Christ Himself!

Ex. i. 9.

James iii. 18.

Heb. v. 8. *Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the*

things which he suffered. And not one of his followers of whom we know anything, but was called to pass through the furnace ; not one but had to endure *a great flight of afflictions* ; and the more eminent the Heb. x. 32. saint, the more arduous the sanctifying conflict. It was through suffering they were trained and disciplined to that humility and self-sacrifice which is the soul of all true greatness. And it is so still. No man of strong faith, faith to endure patiently and act vigorously ; to brave censure, to defy the world, and in the fear of God to triumph over every other fear ; no such man but has been called to endure sufferings from within and sufferings from without, with which mere bodily torment is not to be compared. It is not in ease and comfort, in luxury and self-indulgence, that men are accomplished and equipped as spiritual heroes. It is not thus that they learn to break from *the house of bondage*, and Ex. xiii. 8. become meet for an entrance into the land of promise. To be *crucified to the world*, to be *crucified* Gal. vi. 14. *with Christ*, to *know the fellowship of his sufferings*, Gal. ii. 20. *being made conformable to his death*, these surely are Philp. iii. 10. not idle exaggerations, and words without meaning. They import a process, a discipline, a self-sacrifice, from which flesh and blood instinctively recoil, but which must inevitably be endured, if by patient continuance in well-doing we seek for glory, honour and Rom. ii. 7. *immortality*. It is only *through much tribulation that* Acts xiv. 22. *we can enter into the kingdom* ; only by *suffering with* 2 Tim. ii. 12.

Him here, that we can hope to *reign with Him* hereafter.

It is so with us individually, it is so with the Church, it is so with the world at large. It is only through suffering that ever the church can be made perfect. It is only through suffering that the world is to be regenerated. And for such suffering it behoves us to prepare. The *sure word of prophecy* has forewarned us that in the last days, in the days, that is, of this last dispensation, there will be a period of extraordinary and terrible commotion ; a shaking of
 Hag. ii. 6. *the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land ;*
 Heb. xii. 25. *a shaking of all nations ;* that before the Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh, this world of ours must become a scene of tribulation and distress the greatness of which is to be conjectured from the appalling imagery in which it is indicated ; *wonders in heaven*
 Joel ii. 80. *above, and signs in the earth beneath : blood and fire and vapour of smoke, the sun turned into darkness, and the*
 Acts ii. 19. *moon into blood.* A dark and fearful prospect is thus disclosed to us of wars and commotions, convulsions and revolutions, political, civil, ecclesiastical, and social, as the process through which the world is to pass in order that Truth may be set free from the trammels of superstition, and the enemies of Christ made his footstool.

May God in his mercy prepare us all for whatever in his wisdom He may appoint for us to do or to suffer, that we *may fulfill the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power !*
 2 Thess. i. 11.

PETER AND CORNELIUS.

ACTS x. 5, 6.

“ And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter : he lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side : he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”

THE passage is very striking if considered only as an illustration of the minuteness and universality of the divine knowledge and care. An angel is despatched from heaven with a commission to a certain individual in Cæsarea, whose house he enters, and whom he addresses by name ; and tells him that his prayers and alms are heard and accepted, and that he must now send to a considerable distance, and enquire for a person whose name and abode are indicated with all the particularity with which we should superscribe a letter. *Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter : he lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side.* Here we have the name and surname of the person

for whom Cornelius was to send; the name of the city where he was staying, the name of the man beneath whose roof he was entertained, the worldly calling of the man himself—a tanner; the situation of his house—by the sea-side; and the fact that Peter was staying there only for a time, lodging with him as an occasional guest: everything detailed with the utmost circumstantiality and distinctness. So true it is, that *the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.* Nothing is too minute or obscure to be beneath his notice. Ourselves, and all our circumstances and concerns *are naked and opened unto Him with whom we have to do.* A consideration, which, realized as it ought to be in our practical conviction, must be either very consolatory or very alarming.

To Cornelius it was, doubtless, full of comfort. He was, as his name indicates, a Roman; and as a centurion in the Italian cohort, was probably a native of Italy; but from his residence in Judea he had become acquainted with the theology of the Jews, and had thus been led to renounce the superstitions in which he had been educated. Instead of the fabulous divinities of the Pantheon he had learned to recognize but one God, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things; and Him he worshipped, not indeed according to the prescriptions of the Mosaic ritual, (for he does not appear to have been a proselyte to Judaism), but according to that

knowledge of the divine unity and spirituality which he had derived from his intercourse with the Jews. He is thus described as *a devout man* ; and one who Verse 2. not only worshipped God himself, but carefully trained his household also in that reverence for the Divine Being which he himself cherished. *He feared God with all his house.* His religion, moreover, was not a mere matter of sentiment, but an active principle which manifested itself in the conduct of his daily life. He not only cultivated piety but he practised benevolence. He not only *prayed to God*, but he *gave alms to the people* ; and this not occasionally but habitually, not sparingly but abundantly. He *gave MUCH alms to the people, and prayed to God ALWAYS.*

Admirable characteristics in any man ; but in Cornelius they were especially so. For Cornelius was a Gentile ; and as a Gentile, he had been nurtured in that bitter antipathy to the Jews which they so bitterly retaliated. And prejudices of this kind are among the hardest things in the world to overcome ; but they yielded to the force of his piety. Having learned to honour God, he had learned also to honour God's ancient people ; and Gentile, therefore, as he still was, to them his heart was open in warm and active charity. In this respect he seems to have been greatly in advance even of Peter himself, who was to be his instructor in the faith ; for in the mind of the Apostle the old ceremonial dis-

inction between Jew and Gentile still lived in all its vividness ; whereas Cornelius, having learned to look up to God as the great and common Father of all men, had learned also to look upon all men as brethren. Most signally appropriate it therefore was, that Cornelius, who, though as yet ignorant of the Gospel, was thus eminently distinguished by its spirit, should be divinely selected to dispel the prejudices of the Apostle, and to open his eyes to the glorious discovery that *God is no respecter of persons*, but that *the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him*.

Verse 84.

Rom. x. 12.

Let us then advert to the manner and circumstances in which this was brought about.

It is clear from Peter's language in the thirty-seventh verse, that Cornelius had heard of Jesus, and had some knowledge however imperfect of some of the principal facts of our Lord's ministry. Doubtless too, he had heard of the ministry and persecution of the Apostles, and of the astonishing progress which the new doctrine was making in Judea ; and as he thought of these things he would naturally be roused to anxious enquiry as to their reality and meaning, and the manner in which he himself might be interested in them. As a devout man, therefore, a man of prayerful habits, a man accustomed to hold intercourse with God, and to pour out his heart before Him, he would be led to make these anxieties the subject matter of his

prayers, and to seek from Him, *the Father of lights*, James i. 17. all necessary illumination in the knowledge of the truth. It was thus, then, that we may suppose him engaged, in secret and prolonged devotion, fasting and praying until *the ninth hour of the day*, the hour of the evening sacrifice, when suddenly he heard some one accosting him by his name; and looking up, he saw, standing before him, a being in human form, but of superhuman aspect; a man *in bright clothing*, an ethereal radiance streaming from his person—an appalling spectacle even to the brave Cornelius. *When he looked on him, he was afraid.* A sense of the supernatural fell upon his heart, and all his mortal strength dissolved within him. *What is it, Lord?* enquired the trembling centurion; what may this surprising vision mean?—*Thy prayers and thine alms*, answered the heavenly visitant, calmly dispelling his terrors, *are come up for a memorial before God*; and in testimony of thine acceptance with Him and for the satisfaction of thy anxieties am I sent unto thee. *And now, send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter. He lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side. He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.* This was the whole of the angel's message, and having delivered it he disappeared. He was not himself to preach the Gospel to Cornelius; for to none of the angels is this grace given; but only to direct him to a man from whom he might hear it if he would.

Observe, therefore, that this heavenly communication was in the nature of *a test*, a trial of his faith and obedience. And it was a test of a severer character than at first sight it appears ; for not only was his acquisition of the truth thus made to rest upon his own exertions to obtain it ; not only was he to send all the way to Joppa for the person who was to impart to him the information it was needful for him to possess ; but it would immediately occur to Cornelius, conversant as he was with the manners and customs of the Jews, that Peter must be a man who moved only in the humblest rank of society, or he would not be the guest of one who exercised a calling so disreputable among the Jews as that which Simon followed. To direct, therefore, this Roman officer to send for such a man, and to listen obediently to his instructions, was like sending Naaman to bathe in the despised waters of the Jordan, instead of the rivers of Damascus. It was a direction which, though coming from the lips of an angel, a proud man would have felt it hard to comply with. But Cornelius's pride was gone. His high Roman spirit had been converted into that poverty of spirit to which the beatitude attaches, and which constitutes of itself a meetness for *the kingdom of heaven*. He had been fasting and praying, humbling himself penitently before the Great Being whom he worshipped, and in perfect consistency with his devout humiliation, he hesitated not a moment to obey.

Let us turn now to Peter, and see how his mind was prepared for the new and astonishing light that was to burst upon him. And here the point to be observed is the resemblance between the two cases of Cornelius and Peter, and the identity of the principle upon which both were treated. To both was there vouchsafed a supernatural interposition; and this too, when both were engaged in secret devotion. Both also were subjected to a test which put their obedience to the proof. For the mind of the Apostle was not illumined at once. A strong and very singular impression was made upon it, the peculiar significance of which he was to ponder, and if possible to ascertain. There was trial in the one case as well as in the other; trial of Peter's sincere and ingenuous devotion to the truth. In this manner, indeed, it is, that divine grace is always vouchsafed to us; a manner adapted to our moral nature and condition, as beings in a state of trial.

Apostle as he was, Peter had yet much to learn. His knowledge of the Gospel was only very partial and inadequate. No idea had he at this period that it was intended for any but those of Jewish blood, and such of the Gentiles as might be proselyted to the Jewish faith. The truth in all its magnitude was too vast to be embraced by him at once. To that knowledge of it indeed which he had already attained he had only gradually advanced, and when he looked back upon the manner in which his mind

had been enlightened, it is possible enough that he might suspect that there were many things in the Scriptures the meaning of which he had hitherto misconceived, and with respect to which he needed much illumination. As a man of prayer, therefore, he would turn these suspicions into prayer, and would make his misgivings and desires known unto God. Much the same process was probably going on in his mind, as in the mind of the devout Cornelius.

About noon, then, on the day after the angelic visitation to Cornelius, and when his servants were approaching Joppa, Peter retired to the house-top to pray. Whether it was his daily habit to retire at this hour, or whether it was an occasional act, induced by some strange and unaccountable movement of his mind, urging him to communion with God, we are not told. However this may be, there he was, praying : laying open his heart before God, in deep and retired communion with Him.

While thus absorbed, he became hungry and would have eaten ; but he fell into a trance, a sort of ecstasy or waking dream, in which the bodily senses are held in abeyance, and the mind is engrossed with some visionary representation imaged to it. Generally speaking, persons who fall asleep in a state of hunger, dream of luxurious banquettings. The imagination excited by the appetite presents to them all manner of dainty viands and

delicious beverages. Peter's vision, on the contrary, being supernatural in its origin, was also preternatural in its character. It seemed to him as if the heavens above were cleaving asunder, and he beheld a huge vessel, like an enormous sheet suspended by the four corners, descending before him, filled with what to him as a Jew would be only revolting; filled with all manner of unclean beasts, and birds, and reptiles. Then to his astonishment and horror, he hears a voice bidding him rise and satisfy his hunger from this magazine of abominations. *Rise, Peter, kill and eat!*—Whence came that voice? Was it the voice of God, or of the great enemy of God and man? Was it a heavenly mandate, or some foul suggestion of the Tempter, like that which he had addressed to Jesus in the wilderness—*command these stones that they be made bread!* Whencesoever Matt. iv. 3. it came, his soul revolted from it. *Not so, Lord,* he replied, *for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.* But his refusal is met with the stern rebuke, *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common!*—Was that again the voice of the enemy, or could it indeed be a voice from heaven?

He must have been in a state of almost painful embarrassment, and would feel strangely relieved when the vessel seemed to be drawn up again from the earth, and lost in the immensity above him. He would feel as if the Tempter were departing from him. But a second time the heavens seemed to

open, and again the vessel descends to the earth, and the command again assails his ear, *Rise Peter, kill and eat !*—That voice—that voice—whence is it, and whose? Can it be the voice of God, commanding the violation of his own law, abolishing his own positive and solemn ordinances? Can such a thing possibly be? Perplexed and agitated he persists in his refusal, lest he should be complying with some foul temptation: but his refusal meets with the same rebuke as before—*What God hath cleansed that call not thou common !* Again, however, he is relieved by the disappearance of the offensive vision; but only for a brief interval: for behold, once more the heavens open, once more the revolting spectacle returns, and yet once more the same awful voice commands him with a deeper emphasis to kill and eat. Does he a third time venture the expression of his repugnance? A third time does the voice return the same rebuke; and then the vessel is drawn up again into heaven, and returns no more.

What is he to think of this? Symbolical the vision surely must be: but what can be the meaning, what the intention of symbols so extraordinary?

To ourselves the meaning is sufficiently obvious, now that we have his own explanation of it.

To separate the Jews more distinctly from the Gentiles, many species of animals, commonly enough eaten by other nations, were by the Levitical law declared to be unclean and abominable, and were

strictly prohibited as articles of food. This law, flattering as it was to their national pride by marking so strongly their national peculiarity, the Jews had always scrupulously observed. The command to Peter, therefore, to kill and eat of the unclean animals before him, and the declaration that God had now cleansed them, was not only a plain intimation that the law which pronounced them unclean was divinely annulled, but that the old invidious distinction between Jew and Gentile, which the law was intended to perpetuate, was itself abolished. A staggering blow to the Apostle's prejudices! A loss of place and privilege to which it would be hard to reconcile him! For though he had not now to learn that the death of Christ was a propitiatory sacrifice for sin, and that the Levitical sacrifices derived all their value and significance simply from their being prefigurative of it: yet that the whole magnificent apparatus of the Ceremonial Law was swallowed up in the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ, and the sacred distinction between Jew and Gentile merged and lost in their common interest in Christ's atonement—this was the last thing that would have occurred to his apprehension. And this, therefore, the vision was designed to teach him. It was to teach him the grand truth that as God *hath made of our blood all nations, of men for to dwell on all the face* Acts xvii. 26. *of the earth,* so He is the God *not of the Jews only,* Rom. iii. 29. *but of the Gentiles also: that the same Lord over all is* Rom. ix. 12.

rich in mercy unto all them that call upon Him : that all men everywhere, of whatever name or nation, are alike comprehended in the indiscriminating mercy of the new economy, and that instead of sinning against God by associating with the Gentiles, he would be sinning by declining that association, or hesitating to recognise them as entitled equally with himself, to all the privileges of the Gospel Covenant. And thus, the sheet or vessel *filled with all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air*, was a representation to him of the world as it is ; the aggregate of all nations of men ; and the command to kill and eat, or rather (to give the full force of the original Greek) to *sacrifice* and eat, was a figurative command to him to preach Christ to the Gentiles, and so to

Rom. xv. 16. *offer them up*, as it were, a sacrifice unto God, and upon the spectacle of their repentance and faith to feed his soul, and enlarge his apprehensions of the magnitude and grandeur of the great salvation.

This, however, he did not understand at once ; but he was profoundly impressed by the vision he had seen, its vividness, its reiteration ; and that voice, and that rebuke, so solemn and so emphatic. That it was divinely sent he could no longer doubt ; but where should he find a clue to its signification ?

He was revolving it in his mind, labouring after some interpretation of it, perplexed indeed, but earnestly reflecting upon its possible import, when

the messengers from Cornelius arrived, and made enquiry for him. It does not appear that any one apprized him of their arrival, but to assist him in his endeavours, *the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee : arise therefore and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing ; for I have sent them.* The Spirit said unto him : whether by an audible voice, the same as that which he had heard in his trance ; or by a certain whisper in his heart, a strong suggestion and impulse, so urgent and peculiar that he immediately connected it with that voice—whatever it may have been, it was something which he felt to be a divine admonition which he was cheerfully and implicitly to obey. Under this conviction, therefore, he at once went down and presented himself to the men, and then to his astonishment he is informed that an angel of God had appeared to a Roman centurion, and had bidden him send for him to hear from him something—upon what subject the angel had not specified—but something which it was important for Cornelius to know, and which it was for Peter peculiarly to communicate ! To what could this possibly refer but to the Gospel ? Upon what other subject had Peter any information to impart ? But how strange that a Gentile, and a Roman officer, should address him upon such a subject ! How still more strange that he should be commanded to do so by an angel of God ! What ! God send angelic messages to an uncircumcised Gentile !

Verse 19.

Light begins to break in upon the darkness, as this thought comes flashing through his mind. Here, surely, must be something like a clue to his vision of the unclean creatures which he was commanded to sacrifice and eat. The film was beginning to clear away from his eyes, though as yet like the man in the gospel, he might only *see men as it were trees walking*.
 Mark viii. 24.

He saw enough, however, to induce him to invite Cornelius's messengers in, and to entertain them beneath the same roof under which he himself was lodged. He was to accompany them on the morrow on their return to Cæsarea. He had the divine command to do so: and he dare not, would not, could not disobey. As his mind began to open to the reception of the truth, his heart began to open with it. Gentiles though they were, and *aliens from the common wealth of Israel*, he began to look upon them through another medium than the disparaging veil of Jewish prejudice; he began to regard them as men and as brethren, and so he called them in, and hospitably entertained them. *And on the morrow he went away with them*.
 Eph. ii. 12.

But it must have been an anxious night that he passed. Suspicions, strong and alarming self-suspicions must have kept him in a state of wakefulness and distressful agitation. That vision and that voice—*What God hath cleansed that call not thou common*—how that voice would haunt him with its

almighty rebuke! What new strange things it would utter to his heart! What new strange feelings it would awaken within him! What! Had he been for so many years an Apostle of Christ, inapprehensive of the grandeur of his commission, and the scope of his ministry? Could it be, that during all these years, he had been labouring under a mistake? that he had been insensible of the value of the treasure committed to his trust? And yet there was that last command of Christ to *go into all the world*, and to *preach the gospel to every creature*—how little had he entered into the meaning and spirit of that commisssion! And there were *the keys of the kingdom of heaven* with which he had been specially entrusted and honoured—one key, certainly he had used in opening *the door of faith* to the Jews: might not that other key be to open *the door of faith to the Gentiles also*? Yet this he had left ignorantly neglected! And there was also that remarkable appellation by which Jesus had loved to designate himself—THE SON OF MAN: not the Son of Abraham, not the representative Jew: but THE SON OF MAN—The Man—the Representative Man, representative alike of Jew and Gentile—of mankind at large—Alas, that it should be so! that he should never hitherto have had a glimpse of the significance of this remarkable designation!

Mark xvi. 15.

Matt. xvi. 19.

Acts xiv. 27.

Thoughts of this kind must surely have disturbed the mind of the Apostle; thoughts that banished

sleep; thoughts that agitated and shook him to the very centre: thoughts, under the novelty and power of which, he must have wept and wondered.—It must have been an anxious night that he passed.

On the morrow he went away with them. Let us bring him at once to Cæsarea, with all these thoughts and feelings fermenting in his soul.

Cornelius was awaiting his arrival in company
 Verse 24. *with his kinsfolk and near friends*, whom, with pious solicitude, he had called together, that they might be benefitted along with himself by the instruction for which he was looking. True goodness, this! But if the love of God be in the heart, it will diffuse itself on all around. He who has *tasted that*
 1 Pet. ii. 8. *the Lord is gracious* must be anxious that others should taste it too: and the degree in which he is actuated by this anxiety may be taken as the measure of the degree in which he is himself the subject of divine grace.

Verse 25. *And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.* It was his reverence for the Most High that led him to this prostration. He conceived that he was honouring God by thus doing homage to God's servant; and under an overpowering sense of the favour divinely vouchsafed to him, he *fell down at Peter's feet and worshipped*
 Verse 25. *him.* Imagine the scene—the Roman officer, in a rapture of gratitude, humbling himself to the ground before the rude fisherman of Galilee!

But the humility of Peter was on a par with his own. Such homage was not for him, Apostle though he was. As a man he felt himself unworthy of it: but still more as an Apostle, labouring, as he did, with his consciousness of incapacity, and those terrible misgivings as to the manner in which he had discharged his Apostolic commission. In the homage of the centurion he would discern, indeed, the keenest reproach. *Stand up*, said Peter, hurtfully disclaiming all title to a reverence which was due to his Master alone—*Stand up ; I myself also am a man.* Verse 26. Rapidly the scales were falling from the apostle's eyes. His spiritual perceptions were growing clearer and clearer. He looked around on the little assembly whom Cornelius had called together; he saw their earnestness, their ingenuousness, their eagerness to receive all he had to teach them. The interpretation of his vision was too evident to be resisted. *Ye know*, said he, *how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or to come unto one that is of another nation ; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for : I ask, therefore, for what intent ye have sent for me.*

And then he hears from Cornelius the particulars of the angel's visitation to him, and the command which had been delivered to him to send men to Joppa for Peter, who would tell him what he ought

to do. And the whole train of circumstances thus laid before the Apostle, and their correspondence with his strange vision; the coincidence in point of time; the arrival of Cornelius's messengers at Joppa just as Peter was so anxiously revolving the import of his vision;—the whole providence of the thing flashed convincingly and irresistibly upon him. God had been working in the mind of Cornelius even as he had been working in Peter's own, preparing each for the other, the Gentile for the Jew, and the Jew for the Gentile. The hand of God was evident in the whole and in every part of the transaction. Assurance was made doubly sure. Evidently, unquestionably, with electrifying demonstration, the barrier between Jew and Gentile was swept away: the distinction was utterly abolished; the Gospel was for all mankind alike, and all men everywhere were placed upon the same level of grace and mercy! Hence the outburst of irrepressible astonishment with which Peter, surprised out of all his old prejudices into the full possession of the truth, opened his mouth and said, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth*

Verse 84. *Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him!*

And now he beheld both God and man in a new and altogether unimagined aspect, and saw, as he had never seen before, the grandeur and glory of the Gospel. He must have felt like a man emerging from a narrow mountain pass, and beholding a

magnificent country spread out in boundless prospect before him ; or like a man, with no idea of any world but this, suddenly gifted with telescopic vision, and beholding the heavens above him studded and shining with the light of worlds innumerable. We may doubt indeed whether his astonishment on the day of Pentecost itself, when *they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with* Acts ii. 8. *other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance*, was greater than that with which he was transported now that he was made to apprehend the vastness of the divine mercy, and saw that *to the Gentiles also* Acts xi. 18. *God had granted repentance unto life*. In getting hold of such a truth, or rather in such a truth getting hold of him, he must have felt his very humanity itself exalted. *Ye shall know the truth*, said our Lord to his disciples, *and the truth shall make you free* ; and John viii. 32. in the consciousness of this freedom the Apostle must have *rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of* 1 Peter i. 8. *glory*. How limited the range of his sympathies before ! How extensive now ! How contracted his apprehensions before, and now how enlarged ! Released from his old Jewish prejudices and antipathies, he must have looked down upon them like an emancipated prisoner upon the fetters which had held him bound ; or as he himself afterwards looked upon the chains that fell from him in the dungeon, at the touch of the delivering angel. It was a new epoch in his history, even as it was a new epoch in

the world's history. Henceforth he became another man—larger minded, larger hearted. He breathed a purer air ; he lived a higher life, seeing as he now saw, and feeling as he now felt, the universality of the divine fatherhood, and *the exceeding riches of his*
Ephes. ii. 7. *grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.*

And let this grand truth get possession of us all. Let it lift us up to its own altitude, high above all our petty party distinctions, our jealousies, and strifes, and grovelling sectarianisms—high above all this earthly smoke and turbulence, up into the pure serene of heaven's universal grace ! There only, in the boundless heart of Him *who gave Himself a ransom*
1 Tim. ii. 6. *for all*, can the Christian feel at home, and in peace and harmony with Christ his Saviour.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST.

EPHESIANS iii. 4.

“The mystery of Christ.”

THAT *God sent not his Son into the world to condemn* John iii. 17.
the world, but that the world through Him might be
saved: that Christ died for all, and that all mankind
are alike comprehended in the grace and mercy of
the Gospel, is a truth so old, and to ourselves so
familiar, that we acquiesce in it at once without
hesitation. But in the time of the Apostles it was
a novelty, an astonishing novelty; and one, which,
to the pride and prejudices of the Jew, was un-
speakably offensive, and almost incredible. To him
it was quite a new and intolerable thing to be told
that the *Israelites, to whom pertained the adoption, and*
the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, Rom. ix. 4.
and the service of God, and the promises; whose were
the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh, the
Messiah was to come; that they who felt themselves
to be a privileged order, a sacred caste, the here-
ditary nobility, or rather the seed-royal of mankind,

had no longer any superiority to the alien, and apparently reprobate Gentiles, but that now in Christ Jesus, all the old distinctions were abolished, and that the salvation of the Gospel was a *common*

Jude 8. *salvation.* And hence the frequency with which St. Paul refers to it in his epistles, and the remarkable language in which he speaks of it. He calls it

1 Cor. ii. 7. *a mystery: the mystery; the mystery of Christ; the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from genera-*

Ephes. iii. 8, 9. *tions; the mystery which from the beginning of the world*

Col. i. 26. *hath been hid in God:* not however meaning what we ordinarily mean by the term, that it was a thing to human intelligence altogether incomprehensible, but only, as he proceeds to explain himself, that it was a thing of which, during all preceding ages, both the church and the world had been kept in ignorance, and the revelation of which was reserved for the times of the Christian dispensation. *Ye have heard,* he says, *of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.* True, as he says in the eleventh verse, this was God's *eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*, but it was a purpose which he had never previously made known, and which He had kept

secret even from the very prophets whom He had inspired to predict it. A remarkable thing certainly, that the very prophets themselves, often and triumphantly as some of them expatiate upon the future enlargement of the church and of the admission of the Gentiles into it, should yet have been all the while kept ignorant of the meaning of their own utterances! Yet such, says the Apostle, was the fact. No one of them was permitted to know that the Mosaic economy was only a temporary institute, to be superseded in after ages by an entirely new order of things, under which both Jews and Gentiles should be placed upon the same level of favour and privilege. They were as St. Peter tells us, roused to enquiry by the divine promptings within them, but they were kept in the dark. They were led to search, and to *search diligently, what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified* ^{1 Pet. i. 10.} *beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*: they felt that the language they were giving utterance to meant more than it literally said, and what might be its full force and significance was to them a matter of eager and awful curiosity; but all that was revealed to their enquiries was, *that not unto themselves, but unto us did they minister*: in other words, that they were picturing a state of things they would not live to see, and which would only come to pass at a period very remote from

Is. xvi. 2-14.

their own day. Just look at one of the most noble of these wonderful predictions, *Behold*, says Isaiah, *the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising..... Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee; for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy upon thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish: yea those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Thus sang Isaiah in inspired and rapturous strain; but he knew not that the Zion he addressed was the*

Zion to which the Apostle tells us *we are come*. He ^{Heb. xiii. 22.} knew not that he was foretelling the glories not of the literal Jerusalem but the spiritual—the *Jerusalem* ^{Gal. iv. 26.} *which is above, which is the mother of us all*. The notion that possessed his mind was in all probability very much the same as that to which the Jews in after ages so tenaciously clung, and against which the Apostles had everywhere to contend, that the Gentiles were to be blessed along with them by being introduced into the Mosaic covenant; that Judaism was to be the universal religion; with Jerusalem as the world's metropolis, and the temple at Jerusalem the world's temple; Messiah reigning gloriously on Mount Zion, and all the kings of the earth and all the forces of the Gentiles bringing thither their treasures, and doing homage at his feet:—a proud thought for the Jew, and dear to him as his nationality itself. That the whole Mosaic institute which God had so solemnly established was ever to be abolished, seemed to him the last and least possible of all imaginable things. It was hidden from the sons of men; hidden beneath the very imagery in which it was indicated; and when therefore it was actually and distinctly revealed that the whole Mosaic ritual was entirely swallowed up in the priesthood of Christ, who had offered Himself up a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of the whole world; that He, the Messiah of God, was not the King and Saviour of the Jews

alone, but the Representative of our common humanity, its Redeemer and Lord: and that in Him, therefore, there was *neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision*, but simply *man as man*, the announcement came upon them with a shock of unutterable surprise. That if this was really the divine purpose, it should for so many ages have been concealed, seemed a marvellous thing; so marvellous that many would not believe it all, but rejected it as an odious imputation upon the God of Israel, and a slanderous disparagement of the dignity and glory of his ancient people.

Even those who did receive it were not without great difficulty reconciled to it; and none of them could ever forget the astonishment with which they were seized by the surprising discovery. *Of a truth*, explained St. Peter, when his eyes were at length opened to the fact, *of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons!* Upon St. Paul the effect, if we may judge from the vehemence of his early prejudices, must have been even yet more staggering; and to this indeed he seems to refer in the reiteration and the emphasis with which, in the chapter before us as well as in other of his epistles, he insists upon it as *a mystery*; a reiteration in which there is evidently immense force of feeling, the echo or reflexion of the feeling with which he was overcome by the first announcement to him of the mighty truth.

And assuredly it is a dark and mysterious thing that for so many ages the great Father of all should have kept his gracious purpose secret, impenetrably hidden in the counsels of his own will ; unrevealed even to the messengers whom He inspired to predict it ! Mysterious indeed ! As mysterious as that He should have selected a comparatively insignificant portion of the human family, and confined the revelation of Himself to them, while all the rest of mankind were left to wander in the darkness and error of the natural mind, and to exhaust themselves in forlorn and fruitless efforts to find out God. That there was nothing arbitrary or capricious in the procedure ; that on the contrary it was dictated by Infinite Wisdom, and for the more effectual exhibition of his fatherly mercy, we may rest assured. But the specific reasons for the divine conduct lie beyond our research. Perhaps, in order to attach the Jewish people more firmly to the law under which they lived, it was necessary to hide from them the fact that it was only a temporary economy ; otherwise the Mosaic institutions might have sunk into total neglect, and the knowledge of God have been utterly banished from the world ; while on the other hand it might be necessary to keep the Gentiles in ignorance of it, lest their jealousy and impatience of the distinction conferred upon the Jews, should inspire them with an animosity yet more fierce and deadly than that which did actually

fire them. Or was it that the human mind was not yet ripe for the discovery ; that a certain maturity of self-knowledge, a certain experimental demonstration of the impotence of reason, and the vanity of philosophy, and the forlornness of the natural mind when left to its own resources, was necessary to prepare the world for the wonderful announcement of the divine mercy ; that indeed the great salvation that was approaching was a truth too stupendous to be received until Christ had actually come in the flesh, and manifested his divinity, and been *declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead* : that, in short, the work of redemption must be actually accomplished, before the mind of man could embrace a revelation of mercy so immeasurably transcending all possible conjecture ? These, however, are merely surmises. All we are permitted to know is that, for reasons of his own, God's gracious purpose was kept hidden in his own mind from the beginning of the world ; that though made the subject of prophecy, yet it was prophecy that was to be understood only by its fulfilment. The coming event cast its shadows before ; but they fell in darkness even on the seer's gaze. To the very Apostles themselves, notwithstanding all the advantages they had enjoyed from our Lord's own personal instructions ; notwithstanding the insight they had obtained under the pentecostal illumination of the Spirit into many of the obscurer portions

of the prophetic Scriptures; notwithstanding all their enlargement of intellect and heart, even to them it long remained a secret, unapprehended, un-conjectured. To the Jew indeed they preached Christ as *the power of God unto salvation*, but without any adequate conception of the immense scope of the divine mercy. They never once thought of going and preaching to the Gentiles. They were like men with an electrical apparatus, contented with operating upon a limited circle, totally unaware that they were in possession of a power and agency which, rightly applied, would convulse the world, and bring all the ends of the earth into instant communication. Rom. i. 16.

You will observe, however, that it was a mystery to which they were not without a clue. For with their Master's clear and express command before them, their eyes ought to have been opened at once to the universality of the new dispensation, and the grandeur of their commission as apostles and ambassadors of the Son of Man. From them the truth was not intentionally concealed as it had been from their fathers; but only hidden by the strength of their hereditary prejudices, from which indeed it required a miracle to emancipate them. To St. Peter it was supernaturally communicated in the vision which taught him to call no man common or unclean. To St. Paul it was, as he distinctly tells us, made known by direct *revelation from Jesus Christ*. Gal. i. 12.

But for this, the minds of both would have remained warped and darkened: but then the scales fell from their eyes, and they beheld a marvellous light. Both God and man were suddenly presented to them in a new and astonishing aspect. The Gospel was developed in all the magnitude and mercy of the

Heb. ii. 8. *so great salvation*; the Saviour was displayed to them

Ephes. iii. 8. *in all the unsearchable riches of Christ*: for now they saw that it was not the house of Israel only, but our common fallen humanity that was the object of his solicitude; that this was the lost sheep which He came into the world to seek and to save; that God was not *the God of the Jews only*, but *of the Gentiles also*; and that as He had *made of one blood all nations*

Rom. iii. 29. *of men to dwell upon the face of the earth*, so by one blood He had redeemed them all.

Acts xvii. 26.

Such, then, is the mystery which, having been hidden from ages and generations, was at length revealed, and is now made manifest unto us. In the wonderful purpose of the God of all grace and mercy, Jesus Christ was *the Lamb slain from the*

Rev. xiii. 8. *foundation of the world*. The curse under which our humanity was brought by the apostasy of our first parents, was thus met by the retrospective operation of the Sacrifice of the Cross, and in the very same instant was removed. Virtually man was redeemed the very moment that he fell. True, he was a fallen creature, and his children inherited from him a degenerate nature; a proneness to evil, which,

uncounteracted, is necessarily developed in forms and habits of practical depravity, covering him with guilt and involving him anew in condemnation: but in benignant consideration of the redemptive work of Christ, taking our place under the Law, and magnifying the Law in our behalf, God has in all ages of the world looked upon us with a Father's eye and a Father's heart, and dealt with us as his children, sinful indeed and erring, but still his children. The great Author of our redemption has ever looked upon us as redeemed; ever looked upon us with the same love which at length sent forth his Son to suffer and to die for us. In Him, indeed, as *The Son of Man*—The Man, that is, emphatically and eminently; the public, official representative Man, all mankind representatively suffered and died, and in Him they representatively rose again and revived. No human being, therefore, has ever perished merely because Adam sinned, nor has any human being ever perished under what is called the imputation of Adam's guilt; nor has any human being under any dispensation ever perished, but simply as the natural and necessary result of his own unrepented iniquities. External privileges have indeed been variously conferred, but *there is no respect of persons with God*. For reasons Rom. ii. 11. inscrutable by us, as we have already observed, the immense majority of our race were left apparently to themselves, to walk in their own ways, while to

the descendants of Abraham were committed *the*
Rom. iii. 2 *oracles of God*, and ordinances of divine appointment; but, in consideration of the work of Christ, all were equally dealt with upon a footing of grace.

Ps. xxxiii. 5. *The earth was full of his goodness. The Lord was good*
Ps. cxlv. 9. *to all, and his tender mercies were over all his works.*

There was mercy for all men, and for all men the same mercy. In proportion to their privileges was their responsibility; and the clearer the light under which they lived, the more aggravated their guilt in sinning against it. From the privileged Jew far more was demanded than from the unprivileged Gentile; and the Jew was therefore dealt with as a Jew, and the Gentile as a Gentile; but man everywhere as man, the child of the divine affections, and all men as alike interested in Him, the Son of Man,
Heb. ii. 9. *who, by the grace of God was to taste of death for every man.* Even, therefore, while *suffering all nations*
Acts xiv. 16. *to walk in their own ways,* He nevertheless *left not Himself without witness* of his fatherly concern, *in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*

Such was the gracious, but still secret principle on which the moral government of this world was divinely conducted until *the fulness of the time was*
Gal. iv. 4. *come*; until, that is, the crisis appropriate to the intervention arrived, and then it was made manifest. Then the mystery was unveiled; and then was publicly discovered both to heaven and to earth, to

angels and to men, the ground on which a Being, infinitely holy and just, had, in consistency with his own inviolable perfections and the honour of his law, been able to extend mercy to a race of transgressors. *When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, and to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God. And then, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Then, because all were concluded under sin, Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. Then all the old distinctions were forever abolished. Between Jew and Greek there was thenceforth no difference, but the same Lord over all was declared to be rich unto all that call upon Him. As it was humanity itself that fell under condemnation in the person and apostasy of the first Adam, so it was humanity itself that was delivered in the redemption accomplished by the second Adam. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself; and now, under the Gospel, there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but only man the sinner, and Christ the universal, all-sufficient Saviour.*

Rom. iii. 25.

Rom. v. 20.

1 Tim. ii. 6.

Rom. x. 12.

2 Cor. v. 19.

Col. iii. 2.

Chap. iii. 5.

In conclusion—*The mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men has been graciously revealed unto ourselves, and it is to be received by us into the understanding, and into the heart.*

It must be received into our *understanding*—in all its unmutilated integrity and grandeur. An admonition that might seem unnecessary; for what truth ought to be so welcome? And yet, unhappily, there is, and ever has been, a large amount of misconception on this all-important subject. There are some, for example, who, notwithstanding the obvious meaning of Christ's humanity, and the plain and unqualified declarations of Scripture, so limit the design and scope of his redemptive work, as lamentably to detract from the mercy of God, and to obscure the glory of his gospel. For surely, it must be a chilling thing for any one to doubt whether Christ died for him or not! Yet if he died for only some, as some maintain, what doubt so natural? Unless He died for all, He may not have died for me! A poor encouragement to hope and effort, to be obliged to rest upon a peradventure, that *perhaps* He did! How indeed with such a doubt hampering and harassing the heart, are we to

James i. 6. *ask in faith, nothing wavering?* Ah! but this is man's theology, not the theology of the Gospel. It is not the theology of that glorious declaration—*The Word*

John i. 14. *was made flesh and dwelt among us!* It is not the, theology involved in his noble appellation—*The Son of Man, The Man Christ Jesus!* An appellation sublimely exclusive of all particular respect of either persons or peoples, and emphatically expressive of the great capacity in which He stood, as the Repre-

sentative unto God, not of a favoured few, but of the entire race of man. None, therefore, can claim Him as peculiarly their own. None can say of Him, as the men of Judah said of David, *The king is near* 2 Sam, xix. 42. *of kin to us, not to you!* None can adopt the answer of the men of Israel and say, *We have ten parts in Him, and we have also more right in Him than ye!* But every man, of every clime, and race, and age, may say—**IF ANY MAN SIN WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS: AND HE IS** 1 John ii. 1. **THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS, AND NOT FOR OURS ONLY, BUT ALSO FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD!**

And there are others who, in miserable misapprehension of this great subject, as well as of their own function as ministers of *the mystery of Christ*, fatally misrepresent the application and efficacy of his redemptive work, by restricting its benefits to the administration of a Sacrament, and even dividing the honour of salvation between Christ that died, and the priest that baptizes! It is only by baptism, they maintain, that we become savingly interested in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, and to be unbaptized is therefore to be unredeemed!—Brethren, these are the vain dogmas of schools and theologies, not the precious truths of the Gospel. The teaching of the Gospel is, not that we are redeemed because we are baptized, but that we are baptized because we are redeemed; and that baptism is but the solemn declaration of the fact, and the dedication of our-

selves to God, as redeemed unto Him by the blood of his Son. Men may preach and teach the contrary. A shew of logic on the one hand, and a shew of authority on the other, may impose upon the unreasoning and the credulous, the superstitious and the weak: but happily, the love of God our Father, and the all-comprehensive sacrifice of Christ our Saviour, are things quite out of the injurious reach of logic or authority; they are realities, everlasting realities, which neither priest can mutilate nor theologian cramp.

Rom. x. 10.

But if these great truths rest only in the understanding without penetrating the heart, of what avail are they? It is the heart that is the seat of faith. It is *with the heart* that *man believeth unto righteousness*. They must be received, therefore, into the heart: they must be wrought into the affections, so as to become in us the spring of grateful and devoted obedience to Him that loved us. Better, indeed, never to have heard the name of Christ; better to have lived and died in heathen ignorance of the great salvation, than having known it not to love Him. Knowledge without love; light in the intellect without grace in the heart—oh, this is the condemnation! This it is that kindles the unquenchable flame, and fangs the worm that never dies!

CHRIST OUR PEACE.

EPHESIANS ii. 14—18.

“For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace: and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and came and preached peace to you that were afar off and to them that were nigh: for through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

IN the context, the Apostle is reminding the Ephesians of the immense inferiority in respect of religious privilege, by which as Gentiles they had formerly been distinguished from the Jews, and contrasting it with the equality to which they were now raised under the Gospel. God, who under the olden dispensation had revealed himself to the Jews only, had at length come forth, and graciously revealed Himself to the Gentiles also; and *now, in Christ Jesus*,—that is, under that new and gracious

constitution of things which He has established in Christ Jesus;—they who *were formerly far off*, an apparently outcast and reprobate people, were *made*
Verse 12. *nigh by the blood of Christ*—they were admitted equally with the Jews to a participation in the privileges and blessings of the Gospel covenant. This reference to the previous disparity between Jew and Gentile, naturally led him to advert to the mutual and deep-rooted enmity which had so long existed between them, and which a right apprehension of the nature and object of the Gospel ought immediately to appease. To this, therefore, he proceeds to address himself in the passage before us, the meaning of which will perhaps be best elucidated by a short paraphrase.

Such then, he seems to say—Such being the position in which we now stand; being thus *by the blood of Christ* alike *made nigh* unto God in being all of us placed on the same footing of grace and mercy, we are also made nigh to each other; so that we are no longer to cherish the old invidious distinction between Jew and Gentile, for that is past and done with; but we are to look upon ourselves and upon each other, simply as brethren, partakers of the same nature, all needing the same mercy, and all alike redeemed unto God by the blood of his Son. For *Christ is our peace*. He has done that which is not only to reconcile us to God, but also to reconcile us to one another. He has indeed incorporated us

together, and made us *one*, having united us in Himself, in the sacrifice which, as the Son of Man, the representative of our common humanity, He offered for us all. True it is, that, till He came, we Jews were a peculiar people, separated and kept apart from all other nations. We had our own religious laws and ordinances given us by God Himself, for the very purpose of preserving us in this state of separation and peculiarity; and these, like the wall in the Temple, that divided the outer court into which the Gentiles were admitted, from the interior scene of sacrifice and worship which we Jews alone were allowed to enter, excluded you from communion with us, and became the occasion of our mutual and inveterate animosities. But all this is at an end now. It was to Christ that these ordinances pointed. Our priesthood, and sacrifices, and ceremonies, were instituted merely as figures; typical representations of Him and his redemptive work: and now, therefore, that He has come, and offered Himself a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of the world, the whole of that typical economy is taken up and absorbed in Him whom it prefigured, and in whom it was fulfilled; so that now, it is just as if the party-wall in the temple were destroyed, and the court of sacrifice were thrown open, that Jew and Gentile, without distinction, might come and worship harmoniously together. In thus, then, abolishing the ceremonial ordinances of the Mosaic

law, upon which, as the token of our national adoption as God's peculiar people, we Jews had so offensively prided ourselves, He abolished also the ground of our mutual enmity. And this He did in order that, as we have said, he might incorporate the two races together ; that He might form them, so to speak, into *one new man* in Himself, their common representative ; and might establish peace between them, by reconciling both in one body unto God ; subduing the natural enmity to God, and the selfish affections that alienate us from each other, by the wonderful exhibition of Divine love and mercy presented to us in the spectacle of his Cross. For what do we behold there but a demonstration of the great and delightful truth that in Him, in the universality of his redeeming mercy, there is nothing of partiality or exclusiveness ; that under the Gospel there is neither Jew nor Greek, but only man as man, and Christ all to every man ! And how can we apprehend this great truth as we ought, without being drawn to the Father in filial devotion, and bound to each other in brotherly love ? Accordingly, when He had thus laid in his death the basis for our common reconciliation to God, and our mutual reconciliation to each other, He came and Himself announced it to his church. He breathed into his apostles the spirit of peace, and commissioned them to go forth, and preach the glad tidings of peace to all the world—to you Gentiles that *were*

far off from God, as well as to us Jews who were already a people *nigh* unto Him; that we might rejoice together in the grateful recognition of Him as our reconciled and common Father in Christ Jesus, through whom we both alike enjoy the same privilege of access unto Him, by the gracious introduction of that one Spirit which He pours out upon us all.

Such is the general import of the passage before us. It contains, however, a certain allusion to one of the Mosaic rites, which will serve perhaps still further to illustrate the Apostle's meaning. *He is our peace who hath made both one.* Here there seems to be a reference to the peace-offerings under the Law; and the idea seems to be that Christ is to Jew and Gentile what the ancient peace-offering was to the Jews themselves; a festal sacrifice which followed the presentation of the sacrifices offered in atonement for sin, and upon which, those whose sins were thus atoned for, were privileged to feast in holy fellowship together. This was the distinctive feature in the peace-offering; that it was the only sacrifice any portion of which the worshippers were permitted to eat; and following, as it did, the presentation of the burnt-offering and the sin-offering, it was strikingly significant of the peace and harmony enjoyed among the worshippers themselves in consequence of their common reconciliation to God. In allusion then to this ancient rite, the Apostle

points to the sacrifice of Christ, as at once our sin-offering, in virtue of which we have filial access unto God ; and our peace-offering, upon which we may feast together in fraternal fellowship. *Ye who were sometimes far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ ; for he is our peace, who hath made both one.* Reconciling us to God, He reconciles us to one another.—And in this, and in no other way, can peace and concord be established upon earth. Until *reconciled to God by*
 Rom. v. 10. *the death of his Son*, we are not only at enmity with Him, but we are strangers to that *love which worketh*
 Rom. viii. 10. *no ill to his neighbour.* The unsubdued selfishness of the natural heart builds up a *middle wall of partition*, excluding us from all harmonious communion with God, and sundering us inimically from one another. The Jew despises the Gentile, and the Gentile despises the Jew ; men worry and devour each other in their ceaseless jealousies and contentions ; nation rises against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and wars are kindled, and armies meet, and the battle rages, and the cries and groans of our outraged humanity rise accusingly against us to the throne of God. It is only at the foot of the Cross that we lay down our unholy animosities, and looking up to God as our common Father, learn to look upon each other as Brethren.

Here then, we have distinctly set before us, the great and benignant object of the Gospel ;—the establishment and diffusion of peace, universal peace.

This is the burden of the whole passage ; peace to this distracted world : peace with heaven, peace on earth ; the very burden of the song the angels sang, when they heralded the advent of *the Prince of Peace*. Is. ix. 6. For this it was that Christ died. For this it was that ignoring all the differences and distinctions among mankind, He gave Himself indiscriminately *a ransom for all*. But, gracious Saviour ! where is 1 Tim. ii. 6. the fruit of thy travail ? Where the satisfaction of thy soul ? Peace ! where are we to look for peace ? Look where we will, back into the ages that are passed, or around us into the world of the present day, and what do we see, even in the midst of our thanksgivings for the restoration of peace*—what do we see, but commotion, tumult, discord, war ; all the darkness and trouble of the storm, with scarce a glimpse of sunshine or a shred of rainbow ! And what is the aspect which Christ's own professing church presents ? Although it has now been in existence for upwards of eighteen hundred years, how little do we see in it to comfort or encourage ! How much to disappoint and dishearten ! Peace ! Alas ! what hope is there for the world when the Gospel itself, the very *word of reconciliation*, the very 2 Cor. v. 19. thing which is to bring us into union, is perverted into the occasion of discord and contention ; when, instead of oil upon the waters appeasing their tur-

* Preached May 4, 1856. Thanksgiving Day for Peace with Russia.

bulence, it is rather the wind of the tempest exasperating their agitation! Peace! It is as if the Saviour had spoken of the *intention*, and not of the *effect*, of his coming, when He said to his disciples—*think not that I am come to send peace on earth ; I came not to send peace but a sword.* Peace! O Thou Prince of peace, surely it would seem that heaven and not earth must be the scene of thy kingdom!

Men of different minds are, of course, differently affected by these considerations. On the one hand, there are those who, because the Gospel has hitherto so little answered its professed design, do not hesitate to repudiate it altogether. And so they tell us that it is a worn-out thing; that its day has gone by; that as every religion that ever existed upon earth had in it some element of truth and usefulness, so Christianity has not been without its good; but that now its energies are exhausted; it is superannuated and effete; and we must look about us for some other agency, some more reasonable and practicable system either of religion or of philosophy, if ever society is to be regenerated, and peace restored to this disordered world.—Such is one of the forms in which Infidelity presents itself amongst us in the present day. Well—perhaps it ought not to be surprising that those upon whom the Gospel has hitherto been ineffectual, should distrust its efficacy altogether, and peremptorily pronounce it impotent

for good. It seems only the natural and appropriate expression of their own heartlessness and unbelief. Happily, however, the power of Christianity is not exhausted because they are unreclaimed; nor because it has as yet done comparatively so little towards the accomplishment of its ultimate object. The course of things is not to be confounded with the event in which they are to issue; nor is victory the most triumphant and decisive to be despaired of, because of temporary failure and defeat. Had the Gospel indeed anywhere taught us to look for its uninterrupted and uniform success, or for smooth and easy triumphs over the evil passions and habits of mankind, there might be ground for distrusting its vitality and power; but when we find our Lord Himself giving utterance to such language as we have just quoted, distinctly apprizing his disciples that one effect of their ministry would be to produce not oneness but division, not *peace* but *a sword*: when we find Him anxiously forewarning them of the impracticable obduracy they would have to encounter, and the rancorous hostility with which they would be assailed, instead of being staggered by the objection we ought rather to regard it as a confirmation of our faith; for what is it but just a signal fulfilment of his own remarkable prediction, and another evidence, therefore, of the truth of the Gospel? Instead then of yielding to sceptical or despondent thought, we should rather look hopefully

and cheerfully on to the period which, however remote, will at length inevitably arrive, when the attraction of his Cross shall be universally confessed, and *all men* shall be drawn unto Him.

On the other hand there are those, who, scouting the suggestion that Christianity is a failure, and having, in their own deep experience of its power, the surest evidence of its vitality, think that the comparatively little which it has done in the world is not merely perfectly consistent with its real nature, but is also signally indicative of its limited scope and its partial purpose. And so they tell us that it is a dispensation for *persons* only, not for *peoples* and *races*: that it is an economy of mercy adapted, not to the moral and spiritual condition of humanity at large, but only to particular individuals; and that it is to mistake the nature, and to impair the genuine glory of the gospel, to represent it in any other light than that of a system designed and adapted for the conversion and in-gathering of units, *one of a city, and two of a family; a remnant according to the election of grace.*—What, however, is the argument of the Apostle in the passage before us? What but most evidently this—that Christ abolished the Mosaic law which separated mankind into two distinct and hostile classes, in order that He might put an end to their hostility, and incorporate them together in Himself as *one new man*; and that for this purpose He gave Himself a sacrifice for all;

Jer. iii. 14.

Rom. xi. 5

that, reconciling, not some of the two races, but the two entire races themselves, the entire mass of mankind in one body unto God, he might bind all men everywhere together in peace and unity. The whole force of the Apostle's argument arises most evidently from the fact that the Gospel is a dispensation, *not* for persons, but for peoples; not for individuals, but for mankind. And assuredly, Brethren, this is the true glory of the Gospel, *that God was in Christ*, ^{2 Cor. v. 19.} *reconciling the world unto Himself: that God sent not* ^{John iii. 17.} *his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved; that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only,* ^{1 John ii. 2.} *but also for the sins of the whole world.* Evidently, most evidently, the scope of his redemptive work is not partial, but universal. He has opened a way by which not *some* men only, but *all* men may have equal access unto the Father. He has established *the ministry of reconciliation*, and commanded the ^{2 Cor. v. 18.} Gospel to be preached *to every creature*, because to ^{Mark xvi. 15.} every creature it is savingly adapted. He sends forth his Spirit with the word, that wherever the Gospel comes, it may be realized by all as *the power* ^{Rom. i. 16.} *of God unto salvation; and He will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, that all flesh may see the salvation of God.* ^{Luke iii. 6.} If therefore all men are not reconciled to God, it is not because it was not Christ's intention that they might be. If the Gospel has been hitherto comparatively inefficacious, it is not because it was not

adapted for universal acceptation. It must be ascribed to something else than the limited scope of the divine mercy ; for that is wide as the world ; it is commensurate with humanity ; large, vast, and deep as the infinite heart of God !

Brethren, the design of a thing is not always to be inferred from the effect of the thing. The design of man's creation was not that he might be a rebel and an apostate ; yet a rebel and an apostate he became. The design of the Mosaic law was not to provoke a cruel and rancorous animosity between Jew and Gentile, and yet such was unquestionably its effect. The design of the Gospel was not to set men at variance with one another ; yet in how many thousands of instances has the effect of it been to excite father against son, and mother against daughter, and to make a man's own household his enemies ! The design of the Christian sacraments was not to separate Christians, but to unite them ; yet what has been more fruitful of disunion ? How often, and how lamentably, has *the cup of blessing* been converted into a cup of bitterness !

1 Cor. x. 16.

If, however, the design of a thing is not always to be inferred from its effect, still less is its ultimate design to be inferred from its present effect. According to the physiologists, the operation of medicine is to excite a morbid action which may neutralize the power of another already set up, and the harmony of the system is thus restored : but stop in

the midst of the process, and infer the ultimate design of the medicine from its immediate effect, and you would say that it was intended simply to substitute one malady for another. In the same way, the ultimate design of the Gospel is peace, universal peace ; peace with God, and peace among mankind ; the glorious harmony of heaven and earth. But this is to be the result of a process : a process long, arduous, intricate, unpromising ; a process which we cannot trace, and which we do not understand, but the issue of which is not therefore the less triumphant and sure. At the conclusion of this chapter, the Apostle images to us Christ's universal church as a temple, built for God's habitation ; but what a scene of confusion does a temple present during the whole long course of its construction ! Are we, from the apparently slow progress of the work, to despair of its accomplishment ? Or can we, from the heaps of disorderly materials with which its rising walls are encumbered, infer the beauty and the majesty of the completed structure ? That temple is rising, and will rise, until at length *the head-stone* shall be brought forth with shouts of *Grace, grace unto it !* But if four thousand years Zech. iv. 10. elapsed before the foundation-stone was laid ; if four thousand years elapsed in mere preparation for that event, surely it is not for us in the hurry and impatience of our spirits either to prescribe the rate of its visible advance, or to estimate the amplitude of

its ultimate dimensions from the limited area it may at present cover. It is a world-temple, and it must be the work of ages. A year, a century, a hundred centuries may roll away, with but little perceptible progress in the mighty edifice. With the great Architect of the Church,—and it is He that built the heavens—*a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years.* However slowly the great work may apparently advance, the word of prophecy is sure: *It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.....And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

2 Pet. iii. 8.
Is. ii. 2—4.

Yes, the design of the Gospel is peace, universal peace, with all the unimaginable blessings involved in that delightful word; and it is by preaching peace in the pacific spirit of *the Prince of peace*, that the glorious design is to be realized. Without this nothing will be of any avail. Art, science, commerce, civilization, statesmanship, diplomacy—all without this will be nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. *From whence, demands the Apostle, come wars and fighting among you? Come they not from the lusts that war in your members? And how are these ever to be subdued and extinguished but by the inspiration and the influence of Christ's constraining love?*

James iv. 1.

It is by holding forth the Gospel in the large and loving spirit of the Gospel; it is by preaching Christ in the self-sacrificing spirit of Him, who, *by the grace of God, tasted death for every man*; it is by Heb. ii. 9. merging all our church and party peculiarities in the one transcendent, all-absorbing desire to make known his love to every one for whom He died; it is by exhibiting Him in all his loveliness as the grand expression of the love of God, and God in Him as the loving Father of us all—it is by this that the good Spirit of God carries on his work; ay, and will carry it on, till mankind shall be everywhere be won from their enmity and reconciled to Him, and the distinction between the Church and the World shall be lost in the universal prevalence of peace and love. This is *the sword of the Spirit*! Eph. vi. 1 This the weapon that shall conquer the world!

The love of God! The love of Christ! The love of the Spirit! Christ bringing down God to man, and the Spirit leading us through Christ to God! God addressing me as his redeemed child in Christ Jesus, and the Spirit helping me to discern God in Christ as my reconciled Father, and to rest my heart upon his fatherly affections! Who, as we speak of this, does not feel something of its power to soften and subdue? Whose heart, as he hears it, does not feel something of its sweet constraining efficacy? Whose can indulge pride, or cherish malice and resentment while he thinks of this? Who but must

feel,—O Thou, my Father, make me thy child indeed! Let *the meekness and the gentleness of Christ* be mine! Yea, let that *mind be in me which was also in Christ Jesus!*

Ah Brethren! had the nominal church of Christ been but faithful to its name and function: had it but confined its cares and directed its energies, not to its own outward and visible aggrandisement, but to the earnest and simple exhibition of the Gospel of Peace, how by this time might wars have ceased to the ends of the earth! And to this it must come; to this it will come. It must and it will be purged of its worldly pollution; its unholy ambition; its sordid, sectarian lust of power and supremacy—of all this it must and will be purged, so that it may present to the world a practical illustration of the unity which it preaches, and be itself a *living epistle of Christ, known and read of all men*. To this it must and will be brought; and probably through a fiery ordeal; a process of deep and protracted suffering—suffering of which the terrible imagery in that prophecy of Joel is perhaps but a feeble figure. Meantime it is for us each and all to evidence to others that Christ is *our* peace: to merge all differences in the love of brotherhood, and the grand and harmonizing thought, that *through Him we all have access by one Spirit unto the Father*; and to let our daily life and conversation be a practical comment upon that prayer which is ever on our lips—*Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!*

CHURCH PRIVILEGES AND DIGNITIES.

EPHESIANS ii. 19—22.

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God by the Spirit.”

HERE we have three distinct figures, illustrative of the honours and privileges attaching to us as members of Christ's church; one political, another domestic, and a third architectural and ecclesiastical; and in these three several aspects the church should be contemplated, as a body politic, as a family, and as a temple, if we would form a complete conception of what, according to the divine idea, the church of Christ is, and what, as genuine members of his church, we individually are. Regarded in any one of these aspects to the exclusion of the others, we should have only a partial conception of it: the three must be combined if we would form

an adequate notion of its entire character and its essential grandeur.

Now there is one idea common to all these representations of the church, and without which none of them would be applicable; and that is *unity*. A kingdom, or body politic, with all its varieties of rank, station, office and employment, is a corporate unity. So likewise is a family: parents, children, and servants, constituting together one household. So too a temple—the temple at Jerusalem, for instance; with its porches and towers, its court of sacrifice, its sanctuary and inner sanctuary, its apartments for the Priests and Levites, formed altogether one sacred structure. And so the universal church of Christ, the aggregate, that is, of spiritual men of every name, and every age, past, present, and to come, constitutes but one body. Spiritual men, we say: men enlightened by the Spirit of God; men whose religion is no mere matter of exterior form and profession, but an internal and vital reality; for to these the definition must be confined. What is called the *visible church*, is undeniably destitute of this character of unity. Neither in form nor in essence is it one. There is no organization, no connection, no coherence in it. It is a mass, not a body; a multitude, not a society; a chaos, not a system. Instead of one, its name is Legion. Between the reformed churches, for example, and the unreformed, what is the bond of connection? What

is the centre of unity? Why in nothing are they united; neither in form, nor essence, nor object, nor operation, are they one. In every respect they are at variance, mutually antagonistic and repellent. A church, however, is a very different thing from *the* church. A church in its entirety is not necessarily in union with Christ: but the church, the church spiritual and universal is his body, and it is *one*. It is a kingdom, the kingdom of God; and God reigns over it. It is a family, the family of God, and God is at the head of it. It is a temple, the temple of God, and God pervades and consecrates it with his Spirit.

But along with this idea of unity which is common to all the three figures, each of them has its own peculiar and characteristic significance, illustrative of some analogous peculiarity in Christ's spiritual church. Take first the figure of citizenship—*ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints*. Here we have immediately suggested to us the idea of honourable distinction, chartered rights, liberty secured by law. Fully, however, to appreciate the force of the allusion, we should remember the veneration with which the Jews of old regarded Jerusalem, and the dignity with which they felt themselves ennobled by their relation to their sacred metropolis. The sentiment is, as all are aware, natural and common to mankind at large, each individual associating with himself some-

thing of the fame and greatness of his native country, and priding himself upon its extent, and opulence, and power. In the time of the Apostle, too, when the mass of the population were slaves, the goods and chattels of their masters, lying at their absolute disposal for life or death, to be a Roman citizen was a distinction, the value of which those who know nothing of slavery but the name, can only very inadequately estimate. To be a citizen was to be a man, an integral part of commonwealth. It was to be identified with its glory : it was to be shielded and armed with the majesty of its influence. In the very name there was a power that commanded the instant reverence of all that could not boast the privilege, and the sympathy of all that did. Hence the alarm of Lysias upon discovering that Paul was

Acts xxii. 27. a Roman, and the deference which he, who had only purchased his freedom, could not help paying to the man who could declare himself freeborn. But what is mere civil freedom in comparison with spiritual

Rom. viii. 2. freedom—freedom *from the law of sin and death* ; freedom from the curse and tyranny of evil and the evil one ; the freedom conferred by *the perfect law of*

James i. 25. *liberty* : freedom to obey the instincts and impulses of our spiritual and immortal nature, and to enter into communion with the Invisible and the Eternal !

“ He is the freeman whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves besides.” He is *the Lord’s freeman*, free by imperial grant and charter from the Lord of

1 Cor. vii. 22

heaven and earth ! What, too, are the proudest of this world's cities and kingdoms to that kingdom which is *not of this world*; that *city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*? What is the earthly Jerusalem to the heavenly? And it is there that the Christian citizenship lies. It is with its glory that, as a *fellow-citizen with the saints*, he is identified; with its inexhaustible wealth, its imperishable splendours. In its registers his name is written, enrolled among *the general assembly and church of the first born*; and under its protection he journeys on, a stranger indeed and foreigner here below, but surrounded with its influence and panoplied with its power. Heb. xi. 10.

We pass on to the next figure, which, though of a domestic nature, is not less august and illustrious. *Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.* Truly, a royal household, when He, *the King of Saints*, is the Head and Father of it, and the very servants are none other than those glorious creatures, those angels of his *that excell in strength, all of them being ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.* Behold, exclaims St. John, in an outburst of irrepressible admiration, *what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ! Beloved, now are we the sons of God.* In this sublime relationship we do actually stand ! Rom. xv. 8.
Ps. ciii. 20.
Heb. i. 14.
1 John iii. 1.

Now the prominent characteristic of a family is mutual affection. A family is held together by love. There is the love of the father for each and all, and there is the love of all for him and for each other. And so it is in the divine family. *God is*
 1 John iv. 8. *love* ; pure, infinite, eternal love. This, as it is the glorious summary of his perfections, the grand resultant expression of all his attributes, is the characteristic of every individual member of his spiritual
 1 John iv. 19. family. *We love Him because He first loved us : and this commandment we have from Him, that he who*
 1 John iv. 21. *loveth God love his brother also.* That, however, which the Apostle seems to have had more particularly in view is the high privilege which attaches to this divine relationship. *Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God :* that is—as children of God, born of his Spirit, and genuine members therefore of his spiritual family, you have a peculiar interest in his love and care. He, the Father of all men, is emphatically *your* Father. Others He regards indeed with the love of benevolence, but you He regards with the love of complacency. Others participate in his universal goodness, but you are the objects of his special solicitude. A child has a certain right to the consideration of his father which no stranger to the family possesses : and so you, as members of his family have a claim upon his affection, which none but his spiritual children can allege. Having

received from him not *the spirit of bondage again to* Rom. viii. 15.
fear, not the spirit of a slave, which shuns his
presence and quails before his eye, but *the Spirit of*
adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father, so He privi-
leges and encourages you to come before Him
lovingly and trustfully, with all the freedom and
confidence of a child, *casting all your care upon Him*, 1 Pet. v. 7.
and looking for all things in that boundless love
which has pledged all his attributes and excellences,
all his treasures of grace and glory, for your per-
fection and blessedness. Further than this, as
members of his household you are in fellowship with
all its branches as well in heaven as on earth. You
have not only the love of your brethren still in the
flesh, you have not only an interest in their sym-
pathy and prayers, but you are come to *an in-*
numerable company of angels, and are the objects of Heb. xii. 22.
their love and solicitude. As they rejoice over every
sinner that repenteth, so are they interested in your
progress, and they watch over your welfare, and in-
visibly they wait upon you, and worship Christ in
ministering to you. And there are *the spirits of*
just men made perfect—you are in fellowship also with
them. *The everlasting arms* that encircle them em- Dent. xxxiii. 27.
brace you also. You are one with them in the love
on which they repose; and as you rejoice in the
thought of their beatitude, so do they joyously
anticipate the period when you shall be added to
their number, and the bliss of all shall be consum-

Rom. viii. 17.

mated together.—Such is the church as the family of God. Such are the privileges of Christians as members of God's household. They are the children of a King; the children of the King of Kings; and all things are theirs, all the honours and royalties of heaven are theirs as their rightful inheritance; *for if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!*

The Apostle introduces a third figure in order to complete the idea of Christ's spiritual church, and of the character and dignity of Christians as members of it. The church as a whole is *a temple*, and genuine believers in Christ are the materials of which it is constructed.

Upon this figure of a temple the Apostle dilates with a particularity to which it has been thought he was induced from some oblique reference to the celebrated temple of Diana at Ephesus, and to the pride which the Ephesian Christians would naturally feel in the magnificence of that astonishing structure, however they might deplore the superstition of which it was the monument. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, as the works of the Divine Architect are superior to the works of man's device, so did the Apostle feel the incomparable sublimity of the idea with which his soul was elevated. If things spiritual and heavenly can be like things material and earthly, then may the church be said to be a temple; but to what material

edifice shall that temple be compared of which this very earth is but the scaffolding raised for its erection, to be taken down when it is completed; that temple in which each separate stone is itself a temple: that temple which, built of living stones upon a living foundation, is instinct in every part with a divine life! To the carnal eye indeed its materials, if discernible at all, may seem contemptible enough, strangely scattered over the surface of the world, in rude and formless confusion; but "spiritually seen, and with the eye of faith," it is a stately pile, ancient as mankind, spacious as the earth, lofty as the skies, reaching upwards to the very throne of God.

Leaving this strain of remark, let us look for a moment or two, at what the apostle says about this temple, and endeavour to explain his imagery. *Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.*

Now, were we to take this passage by itself, we might suppose that as the corner-stone is only a part, though the principal part, of the foundation of a building, Christ was in no other respect distinguishable from the apostles and prophets than as occupying a more important place in the foundation of the church than they did. Yet we know that this was far from the idea which he intended to convey. We know that he constantly taught that the distinction between Christ and his apostles and prophets was a

distinction not of *degree* but of *kind*: and that the relation which Christ sustains to the Church is one altogether peculiar and exclusive. *Who*, says he to the Corinthians,—*Who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but*
 1 Cor. iii. 5. *ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?* Who, or what are we, but simply the Lord's servants, by whose instrumentality ye have been built into the church? *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I*
 1 Cor. iii. 10. *have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon; but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon; for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* Here the Apostle distinctly declares Christ to be exclusively the foundation on which the Church is built, not merely the chief corner-stone in that foundation, the centre of union in which its Jewish and Gentile walls meet and are compacted together; and when, therefore, he uses the language in the text, and speaks of the apostles and prophets as the foundation, it is evident that he cannot mean to rank them in the same class with Christ, and to represent them as sustaining the same relation to the Church as that which Christ sustains, but that he refers merely to the testimony which they officially bore concerning Him. And in that sense, as it is upon their testimony that the whole fabric of our faith is rested, as all our knowledge of the person and work of Christ is derived from them; as it is by believing them that we believe in Him,

we may be figuratively said to be built upon them. In this sense indeed it was that Christ said to Peter, *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock—upon thy official testimony to my Messiahship—I will build my Church.* Matt. xvi. 18. In this sense also it is said in the Apocalyptic description of the New Jerusalem, the Church in its triumphant and glorified state, that *the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.* Rev. xxi. 14. Far indeed were the Apostles from authorizing the error which since their day has become so disastrously prevalent. Nothing could have been more abhorrent to their feelings, than the thought of associating themselves with Christ in respect of saving power, and meritorious agency. Nothing did they more clearly enunciate, and more earnestly insist upon, than the infinite distinction between Christ and his Church, the Redeemer and the redeemed. Upon Him, as at once the author of our common salvation and the object of our common faith, the only, but the all-sufficient ground of human hope towards God, they were built as well as we: upon Him, personally and exclusively, on what He is, and what He has done, and what He is still doing for us as our Representative and Intercessor at the right hand of God; *unto whom coming, writes St. Peter, as unto a living stone,* 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. *disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.*

Such then is the foundation on which the Church is built; on Christ meritoriously, on the Apostles instrumentally. Such too, is the extraordinary mixture of metaphor, the combination of seemingly incongruous imagery, by which the nature and constitution of Christ's Church is illustrated. It is at once a temple and a living structure, animated by an organic life, derived from Christ its living foundation: and accordingly, in the language of the text, it *groweth*; not merely increaseth numerically, by continual fresh additions of stone to stone, but *groweth*, by the proportional developement of its structural parts, through the expansive energy of the divine life within it—*groweth into a holy temple in the Lord, a habitation of God through the Spirit*.

And here we have the characteristic idea of the Church universal, when contemplated under the figure of a temple. It is a *holy* temple; not merely a beautiful, but a sacred structure; a *habitation of God*, erected to his honour, dedicated to his worship, and filled with the presence of his sanctifying Spirit, even as at the dedication of Solomon's temple, when *the cloud*, the visible symbol of the divine glory, *filled the house of the Lord*. In that temple everything was holy. Every stone, every timber, as it contributed to the beauty and completeness of the entire edifice, partook also of its sanctity, and was hallowed and consecrated to the God of Israel. And this is eminently the idea of Christ's Holy Catholic Church,

that living temple of which Solomon's was a type. *Holiness unto the Lord* is its grand characteristic; Zech. xiv. 20. its characteristic as a whole, and the characteristic of every particular portion; for into even the minutest part He penetrates, hallowing it unto Himself, and graciously bringing down into it all of heaven that can be known and felt on earth.

And this, Brethren, is one great distinction between the Church on earth, and the Church in heaven, that here on earth it is God's temple, into which He enters and pervades it with his Spirit; whereas in heaven, God Himself is the temple into which it enters, and wherein it dwells for ever! *I saw no temple therein*, says St. John in his description of the Holy Jerusalem, *for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.* Rev. xxi. 22. There the Church enters triumphantly into God; and in Him it abides, and worships, and rejoices, enveloped with his love, and transfigured with his glory.

Such, then, is the dignified aspect in which the Apostle was anxious that the Ephesians should regard themselves,—as citizens of heaven, members of the family of God, component parts of that great spiritual temple which, in this bad world of ours, God is building to his own glory; that, sensible of the honour to which as Christians they were exalted, they might *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called.* Ephes. i. 1. In this light also it behoves us individually to regard ourselves, that we too may

2 Peter iii. 11. *see what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*

Citizens of heaven, freemen whom the truth has made free, how ought our daily life and conduct to be a manifestation, clear and unquestionable, of the moral dignity to which this spiritual freedom elevates! In separateness from the world, in superiority to self, in largeness of heart, in liberality of sentiment, in generosity of service, in purity of taste, in nobleness of pursuit, in magnanimity of act and aspiration, in all that we are, and all that we aim at, how ought *the perfect law of liberty* to be distinctly visible in us all! How ought the manly spirit of the freeman to declare itself in our fearless assertion of the truth in Christ, and in uncompromising hostility to every form of error which ignorance, or opinion, or prejudice, or power has opposed to its advance! Citizens of heaven, *fellow-citizens with the Saints*, how evidently should it appear unto all men, that we are citizens of a *kingdom which is not of this world!*

John xviii. 36.

Members of God's household, children of God, how ought we to rejoice in the assurance of his loving-kindness and care, and in the privilege of close and filial communion with Him, the Father Almighty! How vigilant should we be against everything that would impair our enjoyment of this high and holy fellowship, and hide from us the light of his fatherly countenance! How heedful should

we be of acting in any manner unbecoming the dignity of this divine relationship ! How patiently should we submit to his fatherly discipline ! How dutifully hearken to his fatherly commands ! How carefully cherish that benevolence to all men, and that brotherly affection towards the whole *household of faith*, which, as *dear children, followers of God*, it Gal. vi. 10. behoves us to *walk in* ; and by advancing in which Ephes. v. 1. we are to grow in conformity to *the image of his Son*, Rom. viii. 29. and in meetness for that *inheritance incorruptible and undefiled*, which He has revealed to our faith as the 1 Pet. i. 4. patrimony of his children !

Built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, built up with all Saints into a holy temple in the Lord, a habitation of God through the Spirit, how ought we, above all things, to *cleanse ourselves from all* 2 Cor. vii. 1. *filthiness of the flesh and spirit*, and in the fear of God to perfect that holiness, that spirituality of mind and that purity of heart, without which *no man shall see the Lord* ! Heb. xii. 14. Of that holy temple each individual Christian is not merely a part, but an epitome. He is himself, or he ought to be, personally and individually, a habitation of God through the Spirit. What ! demands the Apostle of the Corinthians—*know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you ? Know ye not that ye are the* 1 Cor. vi. 19. *temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ?*

Brethren do we think of this as we ought ? Do

we bear it habitually in mind, in our business, o pleasures, our daily intercourse with the world—*am a holy temple in the Lord! I am a habitation God through the Spirit!* I, personally and individually, am this august and sacred thing!—O were we rightfully influenced by this solemn consideration, in what reverence should we hold ourselves! How *circumspectly* should we *walk, not*
 Ephes. v. 15. *fools, but as wise!* How fearful should we be sacrilegiously profaning God's holy temple! He
 2 Pet. iii. 14. *diligent to be found of Him in peace, without spot, a blameless!* Awful indeed is the warning—*If a*
 1 Cor. iii. 17. *man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy, the temple of God is holy—WHICH TEMPLE YE AR*

THE CHURCH THE EXPONENT OF THE DIVINE WISDOM.

EPHESIANS iii. 10.

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

IN the verses immediately preceding the text St. Paul sets before us the true nature and scope of the Apostolic ministry, as a ministry of instruction, instituted for the purpose of bringing all men to the knowledge of Christ, and of their common interest in the grace and mercy of the gospel. This, which was the benignant though secret principle on the moral government of the world had in all preceding ages been carried on, is what the Apostle means by *the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God*. But the great secret was at length disclosed. The mystery was unveiled. *The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward mankind had appeared.* Everywhere

Tit. iii. 4.

therefore throughout the world the great fact must be published and proclaimed. Christ the Prophet, Priest, and King of man; Christ, in his glorious all-sufficiency for all the wants of our fallen and impoverished, but still immortal nature, as *of God*

1 Cor. i. 30. *made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,* must be preached unto all men, that all men might discern their common interest in Him, their Redeemer and their Lord, and enter consciously and savingly into the holy fellowship of the Gospel.

Hence our Lord's commission to the Apostles
 Matt. xxiii. 17. *generally, to go and teach all nations; to go into all*
 Matt. xvi. 15. *the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* Hence
 too, his selection and appointment of St. Paul in particular, to *preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable*
 Verse. 8. *riches of Christ.*

This then was the great business of the Apostolic ministry—to teach, and to preach. To this they were called and consecrated. For this they were divinely enlightened and inspired: and in the discharge of this their high commission, they went everywhere, preaching the word, preaching the gospel, *warning every man, and teaching every man,*
 Col. i. 28. *that they might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

But this is not all. This is not the only end which God has had in view in the institution of the ministry and the preaching of the gospel; but

another and yet higher object was to be answered by it; and that is, the illustration of his own wisdom, his wonderful and diversified wisdom. Christ must be preached, and all men made to see *what is* Verse 8. *the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, to the intent, that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God.* Here, then, we have *the Church*, and *the great purpose which the Church is divinely designed to serve.* It is to expound and illustrate, as nothing else in the universe does or can, the perfection and immensity of the divine wisdom.

A few suggestions may serve in some measure to develope and elucidate the Apostle's meaning.

In the first place, then, by *the Church*, in the sense in which the term is here employed, we must understand, not any religious community at present existing upon earth, but the Church invisible: the Church spiritual and universal: the vast and ever increasing aggregate of the saved. And these are partly, indeed, on earth, scattered everywhere over its surface, painfully struggling against the corruption within them, and the evil without: but by far the greater part in heaven, enjoying *the rest that remaineth to the people of God.* And in this Heb. iv. 9. Church, multitudes are doubtless included who never heard the name of Christ, nor ever were taught either by type, or prophecy, or promise, to look for

the Saviour, but to whom the benefits of his mediation do nevertheless attach in all their gracious efficacy. Infants innumerable, unconsciously redeemed by his blood; and those in all ages and every nation, who according to the measure of light divinely vouchsafed to them, have feared God and wrought righteousness. *Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise* though they were, they were not on that account excluded from the scope of the divine mercy in Christ Jesus; but in the eye of Him, with whom, if there be only *a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not*, they were as genuine members of his spiritual church, as those who, privileged with larger light, worshipped and served Him with a purer faith. Though they knew not Christ on earth, they know Him in heaven: they are consciously united to Him there, and joyously acknowledge that in Him, they had *redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*. These therefore, together with the spiritually-minded under every dispensation—the patriarchal, in which He was promised; the Mosaic, in which he was typified; and the Gospel, in which He was manifested—constitute in the aggregate that spiritual body of which Christ is the Head, and which he will ultimately *present unto Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing*.—By this church then, as

Ephes. ii. 12.

2 Cor. viii. 12.

Ephes. i. 7.

Ephes. v. 27.

thus constituted, and, under the ministry of the word and the influences of the Spirit, gradually advancing to its destined perfection, is to be made *known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God.*

In the next place, by *the principalities and powers in heavenly places*, we are to understand the angels that kept their first estate; the bright, unfallen inhabitants of the heavenly world; pure intelligences, dwelling immediately in the light and glory of the divine presence. A Sadducean philosophy, indeed, presumes to deny the existence of these celestial natures, but the authority of Scripture—our only source of knowledge on the subject, is manifold and decisive. Both the Old Testament and the New abound, not only with references to their existence, but with particular accounts of their appearance and agency, on errands of mercy or of judgment among us; clearly teaching us that they are no inventions of human fancy, poetical personifications of moral qualities or of physical forces, but real personal powers and intelligences, as real as ourselves. Heaven is not all a mighty solitude, where the Great Inhabitant of eternity dwells alone *in the high and holy place*, but populous with beings indigenous to that region of purity and splendour, even as we men are to this lower world of ours: Cherubim and Seraphim, and *Angels, and Authorities, and Powers, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of*

Ps. lvi. 16.

1 Pet. iii. 22.

Rev. v. 11.

Heb. xli. 22. *thousands, an innumerable company, the army of heaven,*
 Dan. iv. 35. *the host of the Lord of Hosts, large in faculty, and*
 2 Sam. xiv. 17. *excellent in strength, by whom his will is done in*
 Ps. ciii. 20. *heaven, the ideal of the obedience to be rendered*
 Him on earth. *Ministering spirits, sent forth to min-*
 Heb. i. 14. *ister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation, in all*
 Ps. viii. 5. *that relates to man, who is made a little lower than*
 themselves, they recognize a congenial object, and
 exhibit a peculiar interest. *There is joy in the pre-*
 Luke xv. 10. *sence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*
 When the Eternal Word became incarnate, *they as-*
 John i. 51. *cended and descended on the Son of Man.* They
 hovered over the scene of his temptation, *and minis-*
 Matt. iv. 11. *tered unto Him* when the tempter had departed.
 They strengthened Him in his agony, they watched
 his sepulchre, they declared his resurrection, they
 escorted Him in his ascension, and entered with Him
 as his flaming body guard through *the everlasting*
 Ps. xxiv. 7. *doors.* To the wondering disciples they declared
 the return of the same Jesus that went up; and
 when, in fulfilment of their word, He shall come
 Matt. xxv. 31. *again in his glory, and all the holy angels with Him,*
 Matt. xxiv. 31. *they shall gather his elect from the four winds of heaven.*
 There are then these angelic dignities and ministers,
 these *principalities and powers in the heavenly places.*
 They are not the creation of fancy, but the creatures
 of God, made like ourselves in his own image;
 made to love, and serve, and worship Him, and to
 enjoy their own existence by delighting themselves

in his perfections. They are the elder children in our Father's house, who have never at any time transgressed his commandments, and therefore they are ever with Him and *they do always behold his face.* Matt. xviii. 10. They see his glory; they see it in Himself, and they see it in his works, in heaven, and in earth, and in all places of his dominion.

Noble, however, as they are in faculty, and vast as is the field of their intellectual vision—and from those heavenly eminences the view must be immense—it is still only a part of his ways that they see. There are things which they know not: things which are inscrutable to their penetration: and with respect to which, though for thousands of years they have been labouring to comprehend them, they have still, like ourselves, to wonder and to wait. However vivid and quick their intuitions of truth, their knowledge must, like our own, be in great part the result of observation and experience, and the application of their powers to their appropriate objects. Their perceptions can only be successive, their attainments only gradual. They must *grow* in their knowledge of God; and this, by studiously observing his works and ways, and the orderly evolution of his plans and purposes. Every department of the universe is probably, therefore, not merely a field of action, but a school of instruction for them, continually presenting them with some new aspects of the grandeur and glory of the

great Author of them all, but presenting them, too, with difficulties and obscurities which task their intelligence to the utmost, and which excite their curiosity only to baffle their researches. Even to them *He giveth not account of his matters*: and in the course of his providence and the conduct of his moral government, there are doubtless many things that seem to them dark, mysterious, contradictory; and with respect to the wisdom and the goodness of which, they have, like ourselves, to *walk by faith, and not by sight*.

Job xxxiii. 18.

2 Cor. v. 7.

All this, indeed, seems clearly implied in the language of the text, which represents the Church as the appointed medium, through which is to be made known to them *the manifold wisdom of God*; his *wisdom*: not so much his other attributes and perfections, but eminently and peculiarly his *wisdom*. Every other excellence of the divine nature is plain and patent before their eyes. The gloriousness of his power, the severity of his justice, the purity of his holiness, the immensity of his mercy and love—of all these perfections, though their knowledge of them may increase in comprehensiveness, their apprehensions are clear and distinct: but of his *wisdom*—of the ends which he has in view, and the means by which He designs them to be accomplished; of the worthiness of the former, and the suitability of the latter—of his *wisdom* their knowledge is far less clear and satisfactory. They repose in

it, no doubt, a faith the most absolute. They know that all He does, and all He permits to be done, must be strictly consistent with his infinite goodness and holiness ; but how it is so, they do not understand. To them as to us, though doubtless they see far more than we, *clouds and darkness are around about Him*. In these matters—these, the deep things of God—excellent as they may be in strength and intelligence, they are not only students and learners like ourselves, but like ourselves, too, they are embarrassed, and bewildered, and lost, in the windings of the mighty and mysterious maze. Ps. xvii.

For instance :—there is that great and terrible fact which enters so essentially into the whole scheme of divine providence ; that awful paradox, that world-defiant problem, which human philosophy has so long and so vainly endeavoured to solve—the existence of evil under a government of Infinite Power and Goodness—why, the text seems very clearly to intimate that this great subject has engaged the speculations of heaven as closely as those of earth, and that it has proved just as staggering and impracticable to angelic intelligence as to the inferior capacity of man. Ages, probably, before man was brought into existence, it rose before their eyes ; and then, surely, it must have smitten them mute with astonishment, as next to God Himself, the greatest wonder in the universe. Imagine, if you can, the shock they must have suffered when

they beheld the first eruption of evil: when they saw sin breaking out amongst the sanctities of heaven, and spreading its infection there, before the very throne of the Eternal! Why it was that the very possibility of such a thing was not precluded; or why, instead of being instantly annihilated, the abominable thing was only expelled in the persons of the apostate angels, and driven with them into darkness; why it was permitted to intrude into this new world of ours, to deface God's image in his creature man, to corrupt and deprave the entire species, and so to fill the earth with violence and intolerable disorder, that, in the terrible language of Scripture, *it repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth, and it grieved Him at his heart*; why too, when the earth had been swept and cleansed by the waters of the flood, it was permitted again to prevail, to erect itself in such monstrous hostility to both God and man, to drench the earth with tears and blood, and generation after generation through the long procession of ages, to people hell with its innumerable victims: why, *when there was power to prevent it*, such an appalling condition of things should be permitted to exist; how long the foul dishonour was to be tolerated, and in what it was eventually to issue—these were questions which there was none to answer; here was a mystery, to which, though they should explore the universe, they could nowhere find a clue!

That for all this God had his own sufficient reasons; that it was all the beneficent arrangement of Infinite Wisdom, they could not doubt; but to reconcile all this incalculable amount of sin and suffering with the perfections of Him who is *of purer eyes than to behold evil*, and who hath *no pleasure in the death of him that dieth*—who was to enable them to do this? They were familiar, indeed, with the divine promise to man of a Redeemer and a Deliverer; the declarations of the prophets, who *testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*, were household words in heaven: but their total import was beyond their reach. Into these things, as we are told, *the angels desire to look*: for, intently as they might study them in the types of the law and the utterances of prophecy, it was but little they could discern. *The manifold wisdom of God* was still a mystery which held them in awful suspense. Ay, and which holds them still: for into these things they still *desire to look*. Yes; though the promised Redeemer hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; though his priesthood on earth and in heaven has interpreted to them much of that typical economy at the institution of which they were present: though he has discovered the wonderful manner in which the exercise of divine mercy is harmonized with the majesty of the divine Law; though He has illustrated both the holiness and the goodness of God in a new, and

Heb. i. 18.

Ezek. xviii. 82.

1 Peter i. 2.

1 Peter i. 12.

Gal. iii. 19.

Acts vii. 53.

unimaginable, and infinitely marvellous light: though in what has been thus done for the church, much has been made known of *the manifold wisdom of God*, yet still, how much in the magnitude of his purposes and the mysterious order of his providence—how much remains to be revealed, before the wisdom of the whole can become intelligible and apparent! Light has only begun to break in upon their vision. The clouds and darkness are only beginning to disperse. Eighteen centuries have elapsed, and the world is still lying in wickedness! The great mystery of evil is a problem still unsolved! *And I saw, writes St. John, in the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne, a book sealed with seven seals: and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no one in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.* The hieroglyphics of that dread volume in which were symbolically depicted the future fortunes of the Church and the World, at once challenged and defied all created intelligence to decypher them. The Lamb that had been slain alone was able to unfold the roll of the divine purposes: and as seal after seal is opened, and symbol after symbol comes out to view, raising expectation and stimulating inquiry, there is silence in heaven—unutterable astonishment and breathless suspense; suspense, which only deepens as the tragic history advances, and judgment

after judgment, plague after plague, woe after woe, are fulminated against *the inhabitants of the earth*, and evil, evil, evil still retains its monstrous and terrible ascendancy! The souls under the altar, *the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held*, cry with a loud voice, *How long, O Lord!* but the only answer to their holy impatience is the promise of rest for a little season, until fresh victims are added to their number! Rev. viii. 13.
Rev. 6. 19.

Surely, brethren, to the angels even as to men, here is *the wisdom of God in a mystery* indeed! 1 Cor. ii. 7. Here, surely is darkness, the very blackness of darkness, through which we impotently endeavour to feel our way! Well may the whole creation groan and travail in pain together under the oppression of such a mystery! Who, indeed, that seriously ponders it, but must sigh for the period when the long suspense of ages is to terminate? For, blessed be God! the mystery is not always to remain a mystery. There is that in existence which is to explain it all. The clue to it is divinely provided in the Church, which, in its gradual advance and its ultimate developement, is to explain the reason and the meaning of the whole order of providence from beginning to end: to make *known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God*, and to set it before their eyes in an aspect as luminous, as satisfactory, as transporting, as every other of the divine perfections.

And here, then, in this declaration of the inspired Apostle, we have the noblest prospect opening to us both for the Church and for the world at large. For, if this great problem is to be solved by the Church, then certainly must the Church—not the Church in heaven only, but the Church on earth also—some-time arrive at a state of loveliness and grandeur and glory, of which at present it is impossible to form a conception. What indeed is the Church—the true, spiritual Church of Christ—even in its present condition, but the triumph in every individual member of it of truth over error, good over evil, order over confusion, happiness over misery? And if, then, the ultimate condition of the Church is to demonstrate the immensity and the perfection of the divine wisdom in permitting evil so long and so disastrously to usurp the dominion of this world, then certainly must it be, to say the very least of it, by the absolute and universal triumph of Truth and Goodness in this very world itself: by the conversion of the World into the Church: by the establishment of a state of things here, which shall not only be immeasurably more beneficent and admirable than the past has been calamitous and deplorable, but which shall heighten the felicity of the entire family of God, and open in the past prevalence of sin and its consequent suffering, sources of satisfaction and rapture both to heaven and to earth, which otherwise could never have been known or imagined. . . .

Even now we can in some measure understand how the apostasy and corruption of mankind have served to enhance the blessedness of the angelic hosts: how, by enlarging the scope of their benevolent sympathies, it has infused a new element into their joy: and how, by heightening their conceptions of the divine character and perfections, it has added to the fervour of their worship. In the great work of human redemption by the incarnation of the Eternal Word; in his humiliation and self-abasing obedience *unto death, even the death of* Phil. ii. 8. *the cross*, they must have beheld a new revelation of the Deity: an aspect of the Godhead, of which not all their previous knowledge, however varied and extensive, could have furnished even a hint to abate their amazement. Perhaps, too, by his assumption of our humanity, his visible investiture in a created nature, they may be privileged with a more intimate and familiar communication with Him than was possible before; and hence it may be that they were beheld by St. John in his Apocalyptic vision, as mingling their enthusiasms with the praises of the four living creatures and the elders, and rapturously ascribing to the Lamb that was slain, all *power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory,* Rev. 12. v. *and blessing.*

Far higher, however, than this, is the hope which the text inspires of the ultimate abolition of evil in this world, and the glorious reign of Truth

and Righteousness. True, the prospect at present may be dim and distant. The day of triumph may seem very far off. The simple mention of such a thing may sound like folly and extravagance in the ears of many. The politician may deride it as a sentimental day-dream, and the philosopher despise it as the cant of the pulpit; but rest assured, brethren, that as it is in this world that Satan's kingdom has been set up, so it is in this world that it must be overthrown. As it is this world that has been the scene of the long conflict between heaven and hell, so it is in this world that the victory is to be won, and the triumph celebrated. As it is here that *the manifold wisdom of God* has been so awfully obscured, so it is here that it is to be vindicated and glorified. As it is here that *sin has so abounded*, so it is here, and in consequence of that very sin, that

Rom. v. 23. *grace shall much more abound.* Rest assured that, notwithstanding the past and present prevalence of evil, this is God's world and not the devil's, rage and ravage in it as he may. He may desolate and make it a wilderness for a time, but the word of prophecy is sure. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.*

Is. xxv. 1--10. *It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. . . . No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up*

thereon; it shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Yes, brethren, God has a Church in the world: and by this very Church itself—not merely by what has been done for it, but by what, in the fulfilment of his eternal purpose, it is itself to do and to become—by this very Church itself is to be made known *to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God.* In the mighty spread of its beneficent influence, in the blessed transformations it is to effect, in the manner of its success, and in the decisiveness and universality of its triumph, it is destined sublimely to interpret the entire mystery of his providence, and to vindicate the ways of God alike to angels and to men.

Thoughts like these may be our comfort and encouragement in *days of trouble, and of rebuke, and of Is. xxxvii. 5. blasphemy; amid the wars and rumours of wars, the Matt. xxiv. 6. distresses and perplexities into which the nations are cast by the perfidy of princes and the merciless lust of ambition.** All are subservient to the ultimate glory of Christ's Church. They are necessary in the order of providence to exalt the valleys and level the hills; to remove the political and civil

* Preached May 1st, 1859, at the outbreak of the war between France and Austria.

obstructions that hinder its advance, and to *make*
 Is. xl. 3. *straight in the desert a highway for our God.* They
 are the tempest, and the earthquake, and the fire,
 to prepare the hearts of nations for the still small
 voice of the Gospel of Peace. Of this we may be
 confident, that no combination against the truth can
 ever be successful. Let *the heathen rage, and the*
 Ps. ii. 1. *people imagine a vain thing!* Let the kings of the
 earth confederate or quarrel as they will! Let
 them muster their armies, and march to the battle!
 They may demolish thrones: they may explode
 old despotisms: they may destroy each other in
 their destructive fury: but they have no artillery
 against the truth. *He that sitteth in the heavens shall*
laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision! Thou!
Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron: thou shalt dash
them in pieces like a potter's vessel! But for ourselves,
 brethren, let us *serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with*
trembling, looking hopefully up to Him whose word
 endureth for ever, and trusting in His assurance
 that the empire of evil shall one day be overthrown,
 and the mystery of providence be cleared up, and the
 kingdom of God be universally and gloriously
 established in *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the*
 Rom. xiv. 17. *Holy Ghost.*

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the
 1 Tim. i. 17. *only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.*
Amen.

MAN'S DISPARAGEMENT OF MAN.

MATTHEW xii. 11.

“How much then is a man better than a sheep !”

IT was on the sabbath day ; and Jesus was in the synagogue, where also a man was present who had a withered hand. It was apparent to all that our Lord's compassion was touched by the sight of the paralytic sufferer, and that He was about to heal him. The Pharisees, therefore, seeing his intention, and eager to find matter of accusation against Him, alleged the unlawfulness of such a work on such a day. *Is it lawful*, they demanded of Him, *to heal on the Sabbath day ?* Our Lord's reply was the burning utterance of his righteous resentment. *He looked round about Him with anger*, St. Mark says, *being* Mark iii. 5. *grieved for the hardness of their hearts.* Indignantly appealing, therefore, to their reason and common sense, He demanded of them, *What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold of it, and lift it out ?* *How much then is a man better than a*

sheep! To such a lightning flash of truth blazing in upon their consciences, and laying bare, even to themselves, their heartless scruples and their sordid hypocrisy, what answer could they return but silence? They might gnash upon Him with their teeth; they might go out, and in the madness of their hearts consult together how they might destroy Him; but either they must maintain that a sheep was of more value than a man, or they must admit that a work of charity was not a violation of the Sabbath-law.

How much then is a man better than a sheep? The question is directly suggested to us by the eventful times in which we live. It comes, too, enforced with all the emphasis of that most iniquitous war which France so arrogantly challenged, and by which she is now, in righteous retribution, so signally and desperately humiliated.

That, in the abstract, man is the superior being of the two, no one, we may presume, will deny. Even the base philosophy which makes the most disparaging estimate of human nature, and looks upon man as a mere animal, sinking into annihilation with the last breath that he expires, regards him, nevertheless, as standing at the head of the animal tribes, and acknowledges that between a man and a brute, however useful and sagacious, there is

Preached Oct. 16, 1870, for the relief of the sufferers in the Franco-Prussian War.

an interval too vast for measurement. Ay; but it would be a happy thing if men really felt what they so readily assent to. A happy thing indeed it would be for the world, if kings and their counsellors were but practically influenced by the consideration that a man is really better than a sheep! The history of the world would be a very different thing from the bloody tragedy that it is, if the superiority had been but recognized and felt by those who have had the supreme management of the world's affairs. Kings would not in that case have been seen leading out their subjects as sheep to the slaughter, nor would subjects have been found simple and brutish enough to exult in the sanguinary summons, and enthusiastically to follow their reckless leaders. No monarch would then have been seen gloating with grim complacency over a new engine of destruction, that with its spreading fire would sweep down whole ranks at a single discharge; nor would any statesman have been heard gaily declaring that he entered upon the war with a very light heart.* We should not then have been called, as now we are, to mourn over grand old cities laid in ruins, and smiling villages reduced to ashes, and fertile provinces, teeming with an industrious and happy population, converted into desolate wildernesses, or lakes of fire and brimstone. *How much is a man better than a*

* Mons. Ollivier.

sheep? Why, it is just because both kings and commonalty ignore the superiority; because they look upon men as mere *fighting animals*, who can handle sword and musket, and can stand up to kill and to be killed, that war with all its horrors is a game which they delight in, and that to dye themselves in blood is to cover themselves with glory.

Universal indeed, even as lamentable, has been the tendency to disparage the value of human life, and the greatness of human nature. Why, we have only to go back to the commencement of the present century, to find that a nefarious traffic in human beings was one of the cherished sources of our national wealth. Men, women, and children, torn from their African homes, were bought as cattle, shipped as cattle, carried across the Atlantic as cattle, to be sold again as cattle in our West Indian Colonies! Nor was it without the very utmost difficulty, without indeed, almost incredible efforts of patient persevering benevolence on behalf of the poor African, that the conscience of the country was at length roused to the abolition of the execrable trade. For upwards of twenty years, eloquence and philanthropy, the noblest and purest, were vainly exerted against the commercial rapacity of the nation. That a man is much better than a sheep was not indeed denied; for this was the very basis of the detestable traffic: but the essence of his superiority was only his marketable value, and con-

sisted simply in the fact that when put up to auction he fetched a larger price!

The cause of justice and humanity was at length, however, triumphant, and the country was happily delivered from this crying iniquity. But for years after the abolition of the slave trade, the opinion of the legislature as to the relative value of a sheep and a man seemed to run very much in favour of the sheep. It must be within the recollection of many persons present, that to *steal* a sheep was, in the eye of the law, just as great a crime as to *murder* a man. For both offences there was the same punishment—death; and, as sheepstealing was more common than murder, more sheepstealers than murderers were hanged. The question with us then seemed to be, not—how much is a man better than a sheep, but—how much is a sheep better than a man?

From this flagrant inhumanity also, along with many others equally shocking, the statute book was gradually purged, and a better and wiser spirit has since animated our legislation: but still, the tendency to disparage human life, and to treat man as a mere working animal, is almost everywhere more or less apparent. Else, what need of legislative interference and special enactments limiting the hours of daily labour? Whence the necessity for a law determining the age beneath which children shall not be set to drudge in the unwholesome atmosphere of steam mills, and cotton factories? Whence the

necessity of a body of Inspectors to secure the observance of a law so reasonable and humane? Whence too, those persistent endeavours to evade the law, which the vigilance of the Inspectors occasionally brings to light? Overtasked seamstresses, and needlewomen wasted to a shadow by their constant ill-paid toil,—are these but myths and fictitious cruelties? And what do all these, and many similar things indicate but a dominating selfishness; a hard exacting spirit, bent only upon getting all it can: a greediness of gain, which is but too apt to forget the distinction between the man and the animal, and to look upon him only as so much better than a sheep, as he is better able to toil and slave, and fill the pockets of his employer!

But let us turn to some higher considerations.

How much then is a man better than a sheep? There are certain characters to whom the question might be appropriately addressed, and whom, if they be not past all feeling, it could only cover with shame and confusion of face. Take, for instance, the libertine and the voluptuary: the man who in the grossness of his sensuality surrenders himself to the lawlessness of appetite and passion, and in whom the animal is uppermost, if not all. Such men we know there are in thousands. But what is the estimate which such a man puts upon himself? What value does he attach to the superiority of his human nature, when he can thus sink the man into the

brute, and rejoice and revel in his degradation? How much is such a man better than a sheep? Nay, rather, how much is such a man worse than a swine!

But these are the lowest of the low. Take then a man of a higher grade, and intellectually more cultivated and refined. Take your man of fashion, your man of pleasure, your man of the world, polished in manners, fastidious in taste, exclusive in his society, affecting a lofty superiority to everything vulgar, an unutterable aversion for everything coarse, and mean, and degrading:—a man of the world: a man, that is, in whom the spirit of the world, which is pure selfishness, is supreme: a man wrapt up in himself: living to himself and for himself: a man whose great object is his own interest, his own ease, his own satisfaction, to the total disregard of the interest and well-being of others:—a man of the world, a man that is of *this* world: a man heedless of any world but this, and to whom this world is all. Such men also there are in thousands; but how much is such a man better than a sheep? How much, in his own practical estimate of himself? In what does his superiority consist? What duty does he recognize? What obligation does he feel? What claim does he admit? What beneficial purpose does he answer which a sheep does not? If he is in any way useful to society, he is so just as a sheep is, involuntarily, not from intention. Does he afford employment to others

and the means of subsistence? So likewise does the sheep, and with just as much of benevolent purpose. The sheep seeks only its own gratification, and what does he do more? The sheep regales itself in its pasture, and cannot be thankful: he luxuriates in numberless delights, and with a heart just as thankless. With all his natural superiority as a man, how much is he practically better than a sheep? Nay, how much is he not worse? The sheep fulfils the law of its being and the purpose of its creation: he lives in the constant violation of both. The sheep hears the shepherd's voice and follows him: but him the Good Shepherd calls in vain; he harkens only to the voice of the stranger!

How much then is a man better than a sheep? From the lips of our Lord how deep and full is the significance of this language! Not that He deemed a sheep a contemptible thing: for not a creature that had life, but had some share in his regard; even
 Matt. vi. 26. *the fowls of the air, even the lilies of the field. Not*
Solomon in all his glory, He said, was arrayed like
 Ps. xviii. 85. *one of these. His gentleness made everything great.*
 And how tenderly He looked upon the sheep of the pasture; with what a dignity, indeed, He was pleased to adorn them, is evident from his selection of them as specifically the emblems of his disciples, whom He loved to call *his sheep*, even as He loved to liken Himself to the *shepherd* of the flock. How

John x. 14.

then must He have looked upon man ! Man created in the image of God, and though fallen and depraved, retaining even in his fall some lineaments of the divine likeness, and still capable of restoration to his original beauty ! Man, whose brother He had stooped to become, and for whom He laboured, and sorrowed, and suffered, and died, that He might renew him in *the image of Him that* Col. iv. 10. *created him !* Man, with his rational nature, his moral accountability, his deathless spirit, with its awful capabilities of weal and woe reaching upwards to heaven and downwards to hell—with what a deep unutterable solicitude of love did He look upon him ! Even the vilest and most depraved, the outcasts of society, those whom men shunned with loathing and disgust, if they but turned to Him a trustful eye, met instantly an answering look : a look that raised, and cheered, and strengthened them, and animated them with a new and nobler life. Oh ! if man but looked on man with the eyes of Jesus Christ, where would be man's cold and infidel contempt of man ? Christ did not disparage, and degrade, and trample him ! Christ did not treat him as a mere machine of flesh and blood ! He loved him and redeemed him ! He bore his sins and carried his sorrows ! He honoured him, ennobled him, exalted him, lifting up our humanity from *the dunghill* and *the dust*, and setting it on high, Ps. cxiii. 7. above even the *principalities and the powers in the* Ephes. i. 21.

heavenly places ! To shew us the estimate He sets upon man, not only did He Himself come down from heaven and take our nature upon Him, but He took it up with Him into Heaven again, and there, upon His Father's throne, He wears it now, and in it He is worshipped by all the hosts of angels !

And how carefully He enjoined upon us the sentiments it behoves us to cherish, as those whom He was not ashamed to call his brethren ! How earnestly He taught us to love one another ! Even as
 John xiii. 34. He loved us, to love one another ! How He instructed us to recognise and reverence ourselves and all men, as all alike the children of the Great Father of all ! How He set before us God's universal and indiscriminating goodness, and exhorted and commanded us—*I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for He maketh his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*
 Matt. v. 44.

Such was the mind of our Master, Christ. Such is the spirit of the gospel of Christ. And it is only as this spirit governs us, only as *the mind that was*
 Philip. ii. 5. *in Christ Jesus is also in ourselves*, that we can rightly appreciate either ourselves or others : that we can regard ourselves with the reverence that we

ought, or shew to others the consideration which is their due. Only as that fine spirit of love, which breathed in every act and word of Jesus Christ, and which in Him was perfect courtesy and perfect grace, animates also, and breathes in, ourselves, can we be said to advance as individuals in genuine manliness, or as a people in true civilization. Of the advance of civilization, indeed, we have heard far too much of late. Knowledge it was fondly thought had made such rapid strides, and civilization attained to such a happy pitch; the European mind had so risen in wisdom and refinement, and was now so enlightened as to the true policy of nations, that a continental war had become an almost impossible barbarism. Alas, for the empty vaunt! Notwithstanding the boasted advance of science and civilization, the war has raged, and is raging, and with a sanguinary fury never surpassed. And now the French capitol is threatened with bombardment, and to the general horror, ruin is impending over that splendid metropolis, that Elysium of gaiety and pleasure, that grand source and centre, as it is called, of European civilization! Well: of the civilization which admits of such a war, it may rightly enough be the centre and the source; but whether the cause of true civilization would suffer as much as the cause of gaiety and dissipation, from a catastrophe on every account to be deprecated, may perhaps be thought questionable.

For what is civilization? True civilization, whether in an individual or in a nation, is surely not a matter of the intellect only, but of the heart. It surely consists in the development of our moral nature, the education of our moral sensibilities, the refinement of our moral sentiments, fully as much as in intellectual culture and scientific progress. To promote the latter to the neglect of the former, is to cultivate and civilize only half the man; and the result can only be some unnatural and monstrous production, like those sad specimens of human deformity we sometimes see, in which a giant's head is mocked by the body of a dwarf. True civilization consists, if, as Christians, Christianity is to be our rule, in the growth within us of the mind that was in Christ Jesus. It is conformity to Him; to his gentleness and benignity, his self-sacrificing benevolence, his all-embracing love and mercy. This is the true civilization: and men are civilized, and nations are civilized, only in proportion as this is their characteristic. Where this is wanting both men are barbarous and nations are barbarous, however they may be distinguished by literary eminence and scientific achievements, and the arts and elegancies that embellish life. These, indeed, are but the polished exterior, the veneer and varnish of society; and they may shine with the most admirable lustre where there is a deplorable absence of substantial virtue and moral worth; where

indeed they are but the glittering cover of falsehood, and vice, and utter corruption, palaces of marble for *habitations of cruelty*.

Ps. lxxiv. 20.

Christianity, we say, practical Christianity is the only true civilization. A nation unchristianized is uncivilized; And the degree in which a nation is christianized may be argued, and in a great measure ascertained, not merely from the orthodoxy of its creed, the purity of its worship, the multitude of its churches, or its zeal for the dissemination of Gospel truth, however important these may be: but also from the feeling it cherishes for man as man: the sanctity it attaches to human life, the sympathy it evinces for human suffering, the solicitude with which it ministers to the material wants of the needy, and the degree with which it is actuated by that merciful and beneficent spirit, of which our Lord Himself was the lovely illustration, and which He so earnestly inculcated upon us. Most noticeable it is that in the figurative description which He has given us of the judicial proceedings of the last day, when *the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory*, Matt. xxv. 31. *and before Him shall be gathered all nations*, the scrutiny instituted relates not to religious opinion or religious belief, but to works of humanity and mercy. Not that religious belief is a matter of no moment, but that the faith which the Gospel demands is a humanizing principle: *faith that worketh by love*: a faith which, apprehending the mercy and Gal. v. 9.

the love of Christ, brings Him down into the heart, and out into the life, prompting and constraining to the imitation of his beneficence.

And therefore it is, brethren, that amidst all the calamities and destructions of this lamentable war, and all the innumerable evils with which our own country abounds, we may yet discern a ray of comfort and encouragement. Black as is the tempest that darkens around us, we may yet see *a bright*
Job xxxvii. 21. *light in the cloud*: a light which certainly would not have shone, nor even been suspected, but for the fierceness and fury of the storm. The astonishment and grief with which the country was shocked by the news of the declaration of war, was only natural in a commercial nation like our own, whose foreign relations are so various and extensive, and whose prosperity is so dependent upon peace. But the deep and universal sympathy which has been excited for the sufferers in the war, and the spontaneity and the eagerness with which the whole country has risen for their relief, is something new, something surprising, something delightful. However questionable the moral and political tendency of the movement, whether it operate as an encouragement to war or not, it tells most distinctly of the growing Christianity of the nation, and speaks ten thousand times more loudly for our advance in real civilization—the civilization which is the grand security against war, than any possible superiority in arts

and arms. Nothing like it, is to be found in the history of the world. In the Crimean war we were parties in the conflict, and it was to our own sick and wounded that we ministered there. That also was a new and beautiful thing: for in no former war had we been moved to similar compassion. No ambulances and nurses were sent out to the Peninsula, long and bloody as was the war with Napoleon there, and welcome as would have been any such expression of sympathy. Such things were not thought of then. But here, it is not our own people, but the stranger, and the foreigner, whose wounds have found a voice that has pieced the nation's heart, and roused it as one man to succour and relieve them. Everywhere the cry has penetrated. Not a village in the kingdom but is thrilling with it,, and in some form or other generously contributing its aid; while delicate women in numbers, and men with hearts as tender as a woman's, have voluntarily sacrificed home and all its comforts, to fly with healing in their wings to those dark mansions of misery, where, pining on their ghastly pallets, lie the mangled victims of man's cruel ambition. *Lord, Luke xxiii. 42. remember them when Thou comest in thy kingdom!*

Far be it from us to indulge in a boastful, self-laudatory strain. Other countries are doing the benevolent work as cheerfully as our own. But that it has been done by us at all; that it has been done spontaneously, without hint or solicitation

from abroad ; that men as men are thus loved and felt for, and that all distinctions of country and nation have been thus lost in the sentiment of a common humanity, and the enthusiastic recognition of a Christian duty—this is a new thing under the sun ; a token of progress, and an omen of good, over which we may thankfully and hopefully rejoice.



INADEQUATE APPREHENSIONS OF THE EVIL OF SIN.

JEREMIAH xliv. 4.

“ Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate ! ”

THIS abominable thing was, as the context clearly shows, the sin of idolatry : to which the Jewish people, throughout the whole of their history, from their departure out of Egypt to the period of the Babylonish Captivity, were always signally prone. It need not, however, be said, that sin in all its forms, as well as the particular form of idolatry, is abominable in the sight of God, and that his wrath is denounced against it indiscriminately in all its manifestations. Without therefore in the slightest degree forcing either the language or the spirit of the text, we may regard this merciful dissuasive as addressed to ourselves, and may hear the voice of God reiterating and prolonging to us the gracious entreaty which He addressed to his people of old, *Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate !*

The words are suggestive of several topics that we might profitably dwell upon, the most obvious and striking of which is, perhaps, the benign and merciful character in which Almighty God here presents Himself: not coming forth in his terrible majesty, and fulminating against the transgressor the penalties of disobedience; but graciously condescending to actual entreaty, and addressing his people as a kind and anxious parent might address an erring and refractory child, in tones of the tenderest affection and the deepest pathos—*Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate!*

Habbuk. i. 13.

Or we might direct our attention to the infinite offensiveness of sin in the sight of God, intimated as it is here by the use of phraseology so redundant. Language, however select and expressive, is too poor a vehicle to convey to us any adequate notion of the hatefulness of sin in the sight of Him, who is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look upon iniquity*. Words must be heaped upon words; and yet with all their accumulated emphasis, they fall infinitely short of the weight and measure of the divine displacency.

The grace and condescension of the entreaty, however, and the intensity of solicitude which it breathes, evidently imply a lamentable insensibility on the part of man to the real evil of sin: and it is to this fact, the fact of the inadequacy of our apprehensions of the malignity of sin, so clearly indicated

in the text, that we desire more particularly to draw your attention. Few subjects indeed are more deserving of consideration: for the perception of the evil of sin, and the consciousness of our utter unworthiness as sinners, lie at the very foundation of all genuine religion. *The Son of Man came to seek* Luke xix. 10. *and to save that which was lost;* and until we feel the real exigency of our condition as lost, it is impossible that we should feel the love of Him who came to save us, or that we should appreciate the greatness of that *great salvation* which He has effected for us. Heb. ii. 8. We must feel our need of mercy before ever we shall apply for mercy; and the sense of our need will exactly correspond with our sense of the hatefulness of sin in general, and of our own individual sinfulness in particular.

We propose then, in the first place, to set before you a few illustrations of the inadequacy of the views which are generally entertained of the evil of sin; and then to offer you some suggestions that may serve in some measure to correct our misapprehensions on this momentous subject.

In the first place, then, a little reflection will convince us that it is only the darker and more aggravated forms of sin, and those which are in obvious and close association with misery, that inspire us with aversion and horror. A chillness, for instance, creeps over us at the sight or recital of some deed of heartless depravity or barbarous

cruelty. We feel a shuddering and shrinking of the heart when we look upon the countenance of a murderer. Our resentment is kindled by gross fraud, or base treachery. We are fired with a generous indignation when we hear of instances in which the sanctity of the domestic circle has been violated, or the peace of happy families has been destroyed by some act of wanton ingratitude, or selfish aggression. In these and the like instances, the idea of misery is so immediately associated with the sinful act; our instinctive love of happiness, our natural sympathies with life and enjoyment are so rudely shocked, that we cannot but be provoked to horror and abhorrence. But let any one narrowly examine his feelings when thus moved, and he will soon confess that his imagination is quite as much affected with the idea of the misery inflicted, as his conscience is offended by the moral turpitude of the deed: that his detestation of it is indeed compounded of the two sentiments; and that if the criminal act were dissociated from the misery it produces, his disquietude would suffer very considerable abatement. And that this is the case is obvious, from the avidity and delight with which the narratives of war and the exploits of warriors are almost universally perused. We can read of battles in which thousands perish: we can read of villages plundered, cities sacked, countries devastated; scenes of carnage and horrible destruction;

scenes in which the worst passions of our nature rage and roar with diabolic fury : and instead of being struck aghast by these terrible exhibitions of sin, and the wide-spread misery inseparable from them, the imagination revels in the slaughter ; the whole frame thrills with delight ; the heart expands with sympathetic triumph—why ? Why because with such scenes the ideas more immediately associated are those of courage, enterprise, heroism, military skill, national honour, the pride of victory, the glory of conquest ! But why should this be so ? Why should these ideas be associated with such scenes, rather than the idea of that vast and manifold misery of which they are inevitably productive ? Or why should not the essential evil of the thing itself, render any such pleasurable associations impossible ? Can there be a calamity direr than war ? Can human depravity be displayed in more frightful relief, or more flagrant colouring ? Can sin assume a more sinful aspect ? Why, then, is not the simple wickedness of war the consideration that principally affects us ? Why is not conscience shocked, and all our feelings concentrated in an intense abhorrence of the thing itself ? Clearly because of our inadequate apprehensions of the sinfulness of sin : our insensibility to its deep and dreadful evil. And slight indeed must be our sense of its malignity, when it thus becomes a pleasure or a pain to us, according to the ideas with

which it may happen to be associated, and when these, its more terrible and tremendous excesses, are so easily convertible into materials of amusement and sources of delight.

If such, then, be the effect upon us of the more monstrous exhibitions of sin, it is almost needless to attempt any illustration of the manner in which we are affected by its less shocking and more ordinary appearances. It is indeed so common: we are so familiar with its presence: the manners and customs of the world are so tainted with it, that unless it is presented to us in some aggravated shape, not only does it not occasion in us any sensible disquietude, but it fails even to awaken our notice. We become inured to it as we do to a smoky atmosphere, which is offensive to those alone who are accustomed to a purer air. Now, our familiarity with sin may be a very good reason for the inadequacy of our apprehensions of its evil; but at the same time, the universal prevalence of sin is the very thing which ought to excite our concern. The fact that *the whole world lieth in wickedness*, is surely the most appalling fact in the world; and nothing can more strikingly illustrate our insensibility to the real evil of sin than the fact, that we can listen and assent to the annunciation of this tremendous truth, with hearts and consciences unalarmed.—*The whole world lieth in wickedness!*—Whose tranquility is disturbed by this dreadful

statement? Whose bosom throbs with a quickened pulse? Oh! were there but one being upon earth contaminated with sin, with what a strange and awful interest would every other being regard him! Were the influence of sin limited, like a malaria, to some particular district, what a terror would attach to the fatal spot! But *the whole world lieth in wickedness*, and we can hear it unappalled!

To descend, however, from these general views to some more particular considerations.

We are all of us sinners, sinners by nature and by practice. *The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* We are all become abominable. Gen. viii. 21.

“We have left undone those things which we ought
“to have done, and we have done those things
“which we ought not to have done, and there is no
“health in us.” Such is the language prescribed for us in the Liturgy; such the confession which every one must make, who will but look into his heart, and honestly examine it by the light of God's word. As a proposition it is totally impossible to withhold our acquiescence from it. We are bound to love the Lord our God with all our heart:—which of us can lay his hand upon his heart, and say that he has done so? We are bound to love our neighbours as ourselves:—Which of us can appeal to the Searcher of hearts, and say that he has done so? But the question is, not as to the assent which we give to this as a mere intelligible propo-

sition, but as to the degree in which we feel it as a deplorable fact. How is our conscience affected by this intellectual conviction of our guilt? Sin is that abominable thing which God hates. As defiled with sin we must of necessity be abominable in his sight. In what degree then are we abominable in our own? When we reflect upon the course of our past lives; when we consider the innumerable mercies which we have been constantly receiving from his fatherly hands, and contrast them with the miserably inadequate returns of gratitude which we have made Him for his goodness, with what degree of remorse are we smitten by the thought of the lamentable disproportion? When we consider the innumerable provocations by which, notwithstanding his ever-present goodness, we have insulted his mercy, in what degree do we feel the wonderfulness of his long-suffering and forbearance! When we consider the incalculable amount of the sins which have been accumulating upon us from the period that we could distinguish between good and evil, in what degree do we feel the load of our guilt, and our absolute dependence upon his infinite mercy?—“Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders!” This is the language of profound penitence; of the most abject self-abasement. It is a confession not merely of sin, but of misery under the sense of sin. It is a confession of our own utter incapability of justifying ourselves before God!

and of the absolute forlornness of our condition without the extension of his mercy. It is the language of sinners, flinging themselves into the arms of his pure, unmerited compassion, as their last hope, their only resource! But how many of us have really experienced anything approaching to that intensity of feeling which such language implies? With how many of us has this been, not the mere formal utterance of the lips, but the genuine utterance of the heart? How many of us, while thus ostensibly bowing at the footstool of the Most High, and supplicating his mercy, have indeed been prostrated before Him in spirit and in truth, earnestly deploring the sinfulness which in these affecting words we have so emphatically acknowledged? *Miserable offenders!* Alas, miserable indeed, when we can repeat this woeful confession with hearts untroubled by its truth, and utter cries for mercy without any feeling of our need, or any concern for its bestowment!

We might pursue these illustrations; but having arrived at this point, we would rather offer you some suggestions with a view towards a more correct estimate of the evil of sin, and its hatefulness in the sight of God.

We remarked, then, at the outset of this discourse, that we are principally struck with an abhorrence of sin, when it is forced upon our observation in obvious and intimate connection with misery. We

naturally shrink from pain and suffering ; and when these are perceived to be the immediate and inevitable consequences of any particular act, we shrink as naturally from the act itself, as from the suffering consequent upon it. It is only when the connection seems dubious or improbable, or when the attention is diverted from it by some interfering association, that sin is regarded with indifference. And it is not often that the connection is so prominent and alarming as to counteract the force of present temptation. Far more frequently it is either totally lost sight of in the blindness of passion, or hidden beneath that fair promise of good by which we are allured to transgression. *When the woman, yielding to the seductions of the tempter, saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,* no terrors rustled in its branches, no mischiefs seemed lurking in its shade ; there was no premonitory portent to startle her imagination or awaken her fears ; nothing to contradict the fraudulent assurances of the tempter, or to intimate the close presence of the inevitable woe ; and so

Gen. iii. 6.

Her rash hand, in evil hour,
Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat !

And just in the same way do men now yield to temptation. Just so are they attracted and absorbed by some seeming advantage, which they must resolve to forego unless they consent to transgression.

Let it then never be forgotten, let it be fixed in the mind as an established and unalterable principle, that whatever pleasure or advantage may seem to be associated with sin, the association is merely brief and illusory, whereas between sin and sorrow there exists a natural and necessary connection: that, however it may be disguised or however obscured, the real tendency of sin is directly and necessarily to misery.

Contemplate it, indeed, for a moment, by the light of its own actual consequences. *Sin entered into the world, and death by sin.* There was a time when sin Rom. v. 12. was not; when *God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good;* when man stood forth, Gen. i. 31. the image of God, and heaven and earth rejoiced together. All then was happiness, because all was innocence. But man sinned, and immediately all things suffered alteration. *Sin entered into the world,* and the fine countenance of nature instantly fell. The earth no longer rejoiced in the light of God's visible smile, but a frown overclouded and darkened all things. Death came, and hung the universe in mourning. Cut off from access to *the tree of life,* Gen. iii. 22. from that moment man began to die. The whole economy of his being was deranged and corrupted; and instead of standing forth erect and strong in life and happiness, he carried about with him a disordered nature and a debilitated frame; a body that spontaneously engendered disease and pain,

and a mind, darkened with guilt, distempered with evil thoughts and hateful passions, that sought its highest happiness in an entire alienation from God. Then came envyings and hatreds, and jealousies, and strifes, and all the dark retinue of abominable crimes. Then came poverty, and want, and the stern necessity of interminable toil. Then came famines, and pestilences, and plagues, and floods, and earthquakes, and calamities and desolations innumerable ; woe upon woe, misery upon misery—all the effect of sin ! All, directly or indirectly, the consequences of *one* sin ! From one act of disobedience sprang all this manifold and incalculable ruin !

But this is not all. The natural and necessary tendency of sin is not only to misery here, but also to misery hereafter. Look then at sin, not merely by the light of its temporal consequences, but by the light of that dreadful flame which never shall be quenched.

Disastrous as are the consequences which sin has produced on earth, it has, notwithstanding, had here only a very restricted operation. It labours under restraints of divine providence, restraints of human law, restraints of religion, of conscience, of opinion. The exigencies of human life ; the necessity of toil ; mutual dependence and mutual support ; the play of the domestic and social affections ; the love of fame ; the pursuits of art and science and literature,

and a hundred other things, have all exerted an influence counteractive of its genuine tendencies; so that the history of human misery, tragical as that history is, throws but a very imperfect light upon the true character and malignity of sin. To know it in its full developement and in all its evil, is happily impossible in this mortal state. There are, however, beings who know it; there are beings who feel it. There is a place to which it will be ultimately banished, and within which it will be confined, where it rages without impediment and without control:—a place and a state indicated in the Scriptures by images of the most terrific import:—*the blackness of darkness; the lake of fire and brimstone; the bottomless pit, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*:—images of misery and anguish, to which the worst of mortal ills are blessedness in comparison. *Sin*, says the Apostle, *when it is finished, when it has had its natural and complete operation, bringeth forth death*; death—not merely the dissolution of this mortal frame, but *the second death*, the death of the soul—a change in the mode of condition of its existence by which all possibility of happiness is excluded, and misery, misery, is the whole of its consciousness. *Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

Jude 18.

Rev. xx. 10.

Rev. ix. 1.

Matt. xiii. 42.

Mark ix. 44.

James i. 15.

Rev. xxi. 8.

And this is the natural order of things. It is not necessary to suppose any superadded inflictions,

though these it is possible there may be. But looking merely at the established order of cause and effect; regarding only the law and constitution of man's spiritual nature,—that law by which sin and misery are linked together here—*Sin, when it is finished,—sin, in its ultimate issues, bringeth forth death.*

Such then is sin when contemplated in its natural connection with misery. But there is a yet more striking illustration of its infinite hatefulness in the sight of God, than can be furnished even by the terrors of the second death; and to that for a moment, turn your eyes! *Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!* Behold Him—Him, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God—behold Him, for us men and for our salvation, come down from heaven! Behold Him, *stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*; agonizing in the garden, crowned with thorns, stretched upon the Cross:—behold Him! and in the mystery of his holy incarnation, in his agony and bloody sweat, in his cross and passion, behold the abominableness of sin! By no less costly a sacrifice could God and man be reconciled! By no less exalted a victim could the honour of the divine law be sustained, and the sinner be delivered from its curse.

It is thus that God has Himself exhibited to us the exceeding sinfulness of sin. In the self-abase-

ment and sufferings of Christ He has set before us an illustration infinitely awful of the abominableness of that which necessitated such a sacrifice; and to them He bids us look, not only as our hope, but also as our warning; not only as the propitiation on which our faith is to rest, but also as an intimation and a portent of the *indignation and wrath, the tribulation and anguish* which every man who doeth evil is preparing for his lot. By them He distinctly teaches us how *fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God*. Fools indeed may make a *mock at sin*. They may brave its terrors now. But how, when *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel, how shall they abide the day of his coming? How shall they stand when He appeareth?*

Rom. ii. 8, 9.

Heb. x. 31.

Prov. xiv. 9.

2 Thes. i. 7.

Mal. iii. 2.

Knowing the terror of the Lord, says the Apostle, *we persuade men*. That terror will assuredly be one day revealed; but why, oh why! should it light upon our heads? What means the gracious dissuasive in the text—*Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!* What, but that the bowels of divine compassion are yearning over us; that our Heavenly Father is not willing that any of us should perish; that He cannot see us sporting with destruction without warning us of our danger; that judgment is *his strange work*; that He is *slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy*, and *hath not appointed us unto wrath*,

2 Cor. v. 11.

Is. xxviii. 21.

Ps. ciii. 8.

1 Thes. v. 9. *but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.* Oh, let us contemplate Him in the gracious and merciful character in which He has revealed Himself to us ! Sin is the only thing He hates ; the only thing that ever darkens his loving countenance with a frown. But this He hates necessarily with a perfect hatred, because it is infinitely opposed to his perfections and to our welfare ; because He is Life, and Sin is Death ; and because to live in sin is eternally to die. And therefore does He so earnestly warn us of our danger. Therefore does He so touchingly expostulate with us—

Ezek. xviii. 31. *Why will ye die ?* Therefore does He direct us to that fountain which He has opened for sin and uncleanness, that being cleansed in it from our pollution, and *being made free from sin, we may*

Rom. vi. 22. *become servants to God, and have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind ; for

1 Pet. iv. 1, 2. *he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.*

THE ESSENTIAL AND THE ORNAMENTAL.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 8.

“ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever thing are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

A COMPLETE compendium this of Christian morals; for what has the Apostle omitted? To what unincluded excellence could he have enlarged his exhortation?

Observe then,—that he does not confine himself to virtues that are absolutely indispensable; virtues involved in the very idea of practical piety, and without a prevailing regard to which the profession of Christianity is a mere mockery; but in his solicitude for his Philippians, as well as for the general interests of religion, he extends his admonition to everything by which the Christian profession may be adorned and made attractive; to the amiable, to

the reputable, to all those qualities and characteristics which commend themselves to the common sense of mankind, and are held in universal esteem. *Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise—if there be anything virtuous, and anything praiseworthy—think on these things.*

The importance then of practical attention to the ornamental, as well as to the essential, in Christian conduct and character, is the subject to which we propose now directing your attention. And let no one think it a subject of trivial concern ; one in the smallest degree unworthy of the sanctity of the day, or the solemnity of this service. It is a subject which the Apostle earnestly enforces upon our consideration ; and one, too, by inattention to which, many persons fail more frequently, and injure the cause of religion more seriously, than by the neglect of those duties which are essential to the Christian calling.

Before, however, proceeding to some few illustrations of the subject, let us endeavour to guard against misapprehension. We are not then going to maintain that those moral characteristics—those tempers and dispositions which are amiable and praiseworthy are the principal objects of a Christian's concern. Far from it. Nor do we intend to say that those persons who are remarkable for their amiable qualities—their sweetness of

temper, their generosity of heart, the grace and amenity of their social deportment; those persons, in short, whose general behaviour is such as to win general respect and esteem, are on that account Christians, and all that a Christian need be. Nothing of this kind. But what we are anxious to impress upon you is this—that where true Christian principle exists, where there is genuine devotion to God, and genuine faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ, there, it is of great importance to go further, and sedulously to cultivate those minor graces by which the Christian character may be adorned and beautified: to study and to practise that which is amiable and that which is reputable, *whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report*: that not only are our own peace of mind and personal happiness greatly dependent upon it; but that our character in the church and in the world, the measure of our influence on those around us, and the very credit of religion itself, are all to a considerable extent affected by it.

In order then to illustrate and enforce this, we will just specify a few instances in which this union of the ornamental with the necessary appears to be more particularly desirable.

And in the first place:—We cannot restrain the expression of our anxiety, that orthodoxy of doctrine should be invariably united with liberality of sentiment.—The word *orthodoxy* literally means

rightness of opinion: and of the very utmost importance it manifestly is to form correct apprehensions of evangelical truth—to base our doctrinal opinions upon the divine testimonies, not upon human authority: to *learn Christ*, and be *taught by Him as the truth is in Him*. To increase in the knowledge of God and *the mind of Christ*, as revealed to us in the Gospel—this assuredly should be our daily care; nor should we ever cease to pray *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened; that an unction from the Holy One may be upon us, teaching us all necessary truth, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*. Here then we have the essential feature in this particular aspect of the Christian character. Now the lovely and the reputable part is to unite with this orthodoxy of doctrine, liberality of sentiment: that is, not to disparage another man, and denounce him as a hypocrite, or a reprobate, or an enemy to the truth, because he does not see with our eyes, and coincide with our views of scripture truth; or because in expressing his opinions he does not adopt our phraseology, or because he cannot enter ecclesiastically into communion with us, inasmuch as he conceives that some of our opinions and practices have a pernicious rather than a salutary tendency:

but to make allowances : to make allowances for the differences of circumstances, for the influence of early association, for the force of habit and education, and for the natural infirmities of the human understanding ; to allow for these things as they affect both him and ourselves, and to give him that same credit for honesty, and sincerity, and devotion to the truth, which we claim as our own due, though he may not belong to our particular body in the universal church of Christ. We say that this candid spirit, thus directed and restricted, and clearly discriminated from latitudinarian indifference, is amiable and reputable ; one of those things which are *lovely and of good report* ; which commend themselves directly to the natural conscience, the unperverted moral sentiments of mankind. The opposite disposition—a spirit of exclusiveness and bigotry, a high, fastidious, intolerant spirit, may indeed recommend an individual as a partizan or a sectarian, but it is far from winning esteem for him as a man ; it is far from exalting his character as a Christian ; and far from adorning the gracious doctrine which he professes, it detracts from the loveliness of the Gospel, provoking animosity instead of promoting concord.

Again:—It is a beautiful and most desirable thing to see piety associated with cheerfulness. True Christian piety consists in a filial devotion to the ever blessed God, as manifested and reconciled to us in his Son

Jesus Christ; in cordial submission to his authority, and implicit resignation to his will. This is the one thing needful—the grand essential of the Christian character. And surely, if any man ought to have a cloudless brow and a cheerful spirit, if any man may be expected to appear serene and happy under the smile of a kind providence, it is he whose devotion to God is thus deep and cordial; he who has

2 THESS. II. 16. attained to *good hope through grace* that his sins are forgiven, and that he is accepted of God in Jesus Christ. Persons there are, however, the sincerity and depth of whose piety it is impossible to doubt, who, instead of exhibiting that serenity of soul which is so reasonable in their case, and thus irradiating their religious profession with the attractive light of a calm and happy faith, invest it on the contrary with a most forbidding gloom, so as to make religion appear the most melancholy of all melancholy things; sad, severe, morose, at war with everything that wears the aspect of happiness. Now this apparent heaviness of spirit, this unsmiling austerity of deportment, as it is far from being one of those things which are *lovely*, so it is equally removed from those things which are *of good report*. Whether it arise from constitutional melancholy, or from a scrupulous avoidance of unchristian levity, or from whatever other cause, it is a disposition which instead of recommending the cause of religion, does, on the contrary, most grievously discredit it. It is

indeed little better than a tacit slander upon Christianity, deforming its genuine and characteristic loveliness, and operating most repulsively upon the world who make pleasure their pursuit, and more especially upon the young, whose natural hilarity is offended and disgusted by that which appears so sombre and mournful. On the other hand, the amiable part of the character, that which commends itself to the social feelings and instincts of mankind, is a mild well-regulated cheerfulness in conjunction with piety—a cheerfulness which diffuses itself like the pleasant sunshine through the circle in which we move; the kindly emanations of a mind at peace within itself, and rejoicing in the happiness of others. A temper such as this is obviously as reputable to religion, as it is amiable in itself. It carries with it a *good report*; and operates most advantageously upon those whom our example is likely to influence, compelling them in a measure to think more favourably of that godliness, which is thus not only compatible with, but directly promotive of, peace, and serenity, and cheerfulness of mind.

Closely connected with this is the union of Christian liberty with careful circumspection. Christianity is preeminently a system of liberty. The service of Christ, being a service of love, the voluntary homage and offering of the heart, is a service of perfect freedom. A law of *ordinances*—

Col. ii. 21. *touch not, taste not, handle not*—is for *the children of*
Gal. iv. 31. *the bondwoman*, not for the children of *the free*. Very
little, therefore, in the shape of particular enactment
or specific prohibition is to be met with in the
Gospel, which presenting us, as it does, with general
principles not minute directions, extends to love a
generous confidence, and leaves it a large discretion.
No man, therefore, enters into the true spirit of the
Gospel, who does not feel and glory in the fact that
1 Cor. vii. 22. he is *the Lord's freeman*, and *not under the law*, but
Rom. vi. 14. *under grace*. This then is the essential feature in
the character. Now the lovely and the reputable
part is to unite with this conscious liberty careful
circumspection; to consider not only what a
Christian may rightfully do, but also what it is
expedient that he should do; not only what is good,
but also what is for the best. There are, for
instance, pleasures and amusements of various kinds,
in which the most strictly conscientious person may
feel that he could innocently indulge, but from
which, notwithstanding, it may be prudent for him
to abstain. Circumstances may render that unad-
visable which, in itself, may be far from wrong. *All*
1 Cor x. 24. *things are lawful for me*, says the Apostle, *but all*
things are not expedient. *All things are lawful for me*,
but all things edify not. There are things which in
themselves are not evil, but which may wear an
appearance of evil; and as it is the part of con-
scientiousness to abstain from the evil, so it is the

part of discretion to avoid even the appearance of evil; to avoid as far as may be the possibility of misconstruction; to exercise such care and circumspection, that our *good*—that which is really innocent in us—may not *be evil spoken of*. It is a fine remark Rom. xiv. 16. of an old writer, when dropping an incidental comment upon the passage we have just quoted from Saint Paul, that “he must often go further than he can with prudence, that will always go as far as he thinks he can with innocence. He that to day will go towards sin as far as he thinks he may, is in danger of going to-morrow further than he should.” And not only is a man’s own virtue endangered, but his good repute as a Christian is very likely to suffer, if he be merely careful thus to keep just within the limits of the lawful: while his personal influence is most assuredly diminished by such habitual freedoms, inasmuch as the distinction between right and wrong, the lawful and the licentious is frequently so fine as to be easily overlooked by those around him, who will be only too apt to construe the liberty he allows himself into a warrant, or at least into an excuse, for indulgences which nothing can justify. Thus then it should be our anxiety to do not merely that which is lawful, but that also which is expedient, and to honour and adorn our Christian liberty by the circumspection and the delicacy with which we exercise it. Nothing more certainly commands the respect of the world,

or adds more persuasively to the influence of the Christian.

We may specify, as another instance, the desirableness of blending kindness of manner with beneficence of action. We need scarcely observe that the desire of being useful is an essential element of the Christian character ; that to be active in doing good is as indispensable a part of our duty as to abstain from doing evil ; that we are each one of us bound in our several stations and capacities diligently to occupy with the talents which God has given us, until we are summoned before Him to account for our stewardship. The talents and opportunities of usefulness allotted to us are indeed various. To some are given five, to others two, to others one, or scarcely even that. But let the talent or opportunity be what it may, there is no man worthy the name of a Christian, who would not consider it a blessing to be made in any way whatever a blessing to others. Some persons however there are,—the character indeed is by no means uncommon—who, most sincerely desirous of being useful, most active in their efforts to do good, and doubtless also succeeding to a considerable extent, have yet in their manner of doing good, something so harsh and ungracious, as completely to mar the loveliness of the action, and to give it almost the aspect of unkindness ; chilling even while they aid, and choking gratitude by the provocation of resentment. Now

it is usefulness blended and brightened with kindness, that is *lovely and of good report*. It is the graceful in combination with the good, that displays the true amiableness of Christianity, doubling the efficacy of simple beneficence, and giving an emphasis to wise and well meant counsel, which no sternness or severity can ever impart. It is the look, the tone, the manner of pity, accompanying the material act of compassion, that pours balm into the sufferer's heart. It is the tenderness of the reproof, that makes it operate like *an excellent oil*. It is the Ps. cxli. 5. *fitness* of the word spoken, that makes it *like apples of gold in pictures of silver*. It is said to have been one Prov. xxv. 2. of the few good qualities of our English Charles the Second, that he would send away a suitor for a favour in better temper when he refused, than his father, Charles the First, did, when he granted the request. The compliance of the one was so coldly ungracious, and the refusal of the other so courteously benign, that the latter pleased the disappointed applicant better than the former the successful one. Brethren, it is far, very far from being an unimportant consideration; for, though doing good in any way is laudable, yet it is the grace with which the good is done that makes the action lovely. It gives a new and resistless charm to beneficence. It procures for the Christian a good report, and for Christianity a fragrant name.

We will mention but one other instance; and that

is, the union of Christian submission with social self-command.

We need fear no contradiction when we say that humble acquiescence in the will of God, patience under his afflictive visitations, is one of the most distinguishing graces of the Christian, and forms an indispensable feature in his character. Yet, it is a striking fact, but as true as it is remarkable, that there are persons who will exhibit the most signal and admirable resignation under those severer distresses, which they recognise distinctly as of divine infliction, who, notwithstanding, will give way to an almost intolerable irritability and fretfulness, under those trifling domestic or social vexations which are incidental to our everyday experience, and which it is an exaggeration to call troubles at all. They will submit to the sorest bereavements of death, they will follow their dearest relatives to the grave, they will lie on the bed of sickness for weeks, they will be brought to the verge of ruin by the vicissitudes of fortune, and manifest throughout the most exemplary resignation, and yet will lose all self-control, and fret, and worry, and indulge a petulance that shall make a whole household unhappy, about some little, insect annoyances, by which no merely wise man would allow himself to be disturbed. Now, the Christian character is very materially affected by this inattention to the amiable and reputable in the temper we display.

Christianity itself suffers from it in the eye of the world, which is wont to look at religion not as it is presented to it in the Scriptures, but as it is embodied and illustrated in the behaviour of those who profess to be religious. But it reacts with a far more prejudicial effect upon the character of the individual himself, who thus yields unresistingly to his infirmities; and many a man, eminent for patience under the severest chastisements of the Almighty, has, by his inconsistent impatience under the petty vexations of life, presented an unlovely character, and lost a *good report*.

Brethren, it is patience and self-government under all circumstances; it is the devout recognition of the hand and eye of God in social vexations not less than in signal calamities, that best illustrates the Christian temper, and makes the character of a man *lovely*. There is no ornament more becoming the Christian, none which he ought more constantly or more conspicuously to wear, than *the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, even in the sight of God,* 1 Peter iii. 4. *is of great price*.

Other illustrations will readily occur to you, but let us now endeavour to extract from the text a few hints, as to the most effectual means of attaining to those things which are *lovely and of good report*.

Almost all indeed that can be said upon this part of the subject is couched in the simple exhortation of the Apostle—*Think on these things*. We have here

suggested to us not only the cure of the evils we have touched upon, but that also which is in a great measure the cause of them. Why is it that so many persons of great intrinsic worth, have so little external loveliness of character? Why is it that so much is said to their disadvantage, and that they enjoy so little of *good report*? It is not merely because the world is slow in the acknowledgment of real worth, or because it delights in calumny and detraction. Nor is it because they are without principle, without piety, without Christianity. But it is principally because they do not sufficiently *think on these things*; because they do not allow to them that importance which is their due. They are concerned indeed, seriously and deeply, about those things which are essential to salvation—the radical and vital parts of the Christian character;—but the ornamental and the reputable parts of the character they treat as matters of insignificant account. As to those things which are necessarily connected with the fundamental hope of eternity, repentance, and faith, and holiness—the things that are *true*, the things that are *honest*, the things that are *just*, the things that are *pure*—of these things they do think: but *whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report*—of these things they do not think, with any serious concern, or to any serious purpose. And so, their peace of mind, their moral influence, their personal reputation, and the

credit of religion itself, all suffer by this negligence. This, unquestionably, is the principal cause of the evil. And hence, the cure of it, and the wisdom and force of the Apostle's admonition—*Think on these things!* It behoves us with fixed and earnest purpose practically to attend to these things. We are not to despise the expedient and the ornamental merely because they are not absolutely necessary to salvation, and may therefore be secondary in our esteem: on the contrary, we are to raise them to that position which is really their due, and to give them the second place in our regard. We ought obviously to beware of slovenliness in our moral and religious character, with at least as much anxiety as we avoid it in our personal attire. We are not to treat the opinion of others with contempt or indifference, but to remember the wise man's proverb—*A good name is better than precious ointment.* Eccles. vii. 7. *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.* Prov. xxi. 1.

It is indeed a radically defective, an essentially unchristian character, that enquires only, what will the world say? How will my conduct appear? What will be the effect upon my character and reputation? But, on the other hand, it is a most decisive indication of folly to say—except, of course, in cases of the utmost moment, or cases of no moment at all—I care not what people may say, nor what they may think of me! For we were not constituted to be thus independent of each other. God, in

giving us our social instincts and affections, our lively sensibility to censure and to praise, has manifestly intended us to be dependent one upon another; and has rested very much of our individual happiness upon the opinions and moral judgments which

Ps. xxx. 5. others may form of us. His *favour*, indeed, *is life*—

Ps. lxxiii. 8. *yea, better than life*; and if of that we be secure, we may defy the world, and be heedless of detraction; but his favour is not to be secured by thus running counter to his own appointments, and assuming an attitude of independence He never designed us to maintain. Let his favour be first, supremely first! Let everything be subordinated to that! But let not those things which are *lovely and of good report* stand for nothing in your esteem! *On these things think!* Meditate upon them seriously, aim at them habitually; that so you may *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*.

Titus ii. 10.

Think on these things—Ay, and humbly, and earnestly seek the divine help to enable you to do so, and to make your meditation upon them effectual! *Think on these things*; and set before your minds the most eminent examples of those whose characters have best illustrated the beauty of holiness: those, in whom strong principle and fervent piety have been most strikingly united with an amiable spirit and a reputable name. Above all, consider Him,

1 Peter ii. 21. who left us *an example that we should follow his steps!*

Phillip. ii. 9. Him, whose *name is above every name*, who was *fairer*

than the children of men, the chiefest among ten thousand, Ps. xlv. 2.
the altogether lovely ! Cant. v. 16, 10.

In Him—but who shall describe the graces of his adorable character?—in Him, we behold all that is attractive and endearing, combined with all that is great, and venerable, and august. Behold Him, in his whole deportment, easy, affable, gentle, courteous, considerate, kind; his seriousness unclouded with austerity, his benevolence unsullied with moroseness, his every look mercy, and his very anger, grief! Mark iii. 5. Behold Him, sympathising with the miserable, familiar with the mean, friendly to the outcast, benignant even to the proud! Behold Him, calmly bearing with the infirmities of his disciples; rebuking them with mildness even when their provocations were great! Behold Him, *meek and lowly in heart*, Matt. xi. 29. welcoming the little children to his arms; weeping over the ruin of the country that rejected Him; submitting to insult without being moved to resentment; and praying on the Cross for those who were exulting over his agonies! Here, we behold an illustration surpassingly beautiful of *whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report*. On the other hand, we behold Him awful in his unapproachable holiness, fearless and indomitable in his assertion of the truth, uncompromising in his hostility to the corruptions of the age, bold and unsparing in his exposure of hypocrisy, dismayed by no menaces, quailing from no consequences, decisive

in action, heroic in suffering! In Him we behold all perfections assembled and harmonized. We behold Him gentle without tameness, benevolent without weakness, dignified without coldness, strict without sternness, energetic without violence. Consider Him! Contemplate humbly, earnestly, devoutly, prayerfully, his transcendent greatness, *Philp. ii. 5.* his adorable loveliness; and *let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!*

ST. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS.

EPHESIANS iii. 14—21.

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

WHEN St. Paul wrote this epistle to the Ephesians, he was suffering imprisonment at Rome : but he was one of those who are enabled to *glory in tribulation*, and however sorely he might feel Rom. v. 8. the restraint upon his corporeal freedom, the iron never entered his soul. Judging indeed from the spirit and scope of the epistle, his chainless mind never expatiated in the enjoyment of a larger liberty, never compassed a wider range of thought,

never soared in higher and more rapturous flight,
 chap. vi. 20 than while thus, for the gospel *an ambassador in bonds*.
 But how true it is—"the world knows nothing of its
 greatest men!" There he was, in his obscure abode,
 Philemon 9. *Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ*
 —there he was, the richest treasure, the greatest
 wonder that the great city contained: but how all
 unknown to the noble, the learned, the curious, of
 whom the city boasted! There he was, the man of
 the largest heart and the divinest mind; the man
 who had seen things, and who had heard things,
 which none of their philosophers had dreamed of,
 and before which all their vaunted philosophy was
 to fall; there he was, in the midst of all that dark-
 ness and superstition, one of the great lights of the
 world, shining with a lustre scarcely then discerned
 at all, but which was to penetrate and illumine all
 lands, to the very ends of the earth! Imagine it for
 a moment—Rome, imperial Rome on a holiday: the
 vast population pouring along its trophied streets to
 some triumphal pageant; or crowding to the san-
 guinary amusements of the Coliseum, all ranks and
 classes from the Cæsar downwards, and women and
 children as well as men, thronging by thousands
 within those mighty walls, excited almost to frenzy
 by the murderous strife, and savagely feasting upon
 the horrible slaughter: and then think, that under-
 neath all this—all this material magnificence and
 monstrous inhumanity; this vast fermenting mass

of refinement and ferocity, elegance and barbarism, and in wondrous contrast to it all, there was this man Paul—this obscure and despised prisoner of Jesus Christ, dictating in his bondage this epistle to the Ephesians ; exerting an influence which was to change the whole aspect of society, and to effect a moral revolution, not in Rome only, but throughout the world ! Eighteen hundred years have elapsed, and Rome has long since crumbled into ruin ; but here we are this morning, meditating upon the words which then fell from him, and which have lost none of their importance, nor any of their power.

The prayer in the text is evidently the outpouring of a great, capacious soul, all glowing with the ardours of divine excitement, and dilated with thoughts and feelings to which no language could give adequate utterance ; thoughts and feelings, which not merely glance from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven, but which, if we may venture so to speak, sweep all round the throne of God, and bring heaven and earth together. The reference in the introductory words, *for this cause*, appears to be the concluding verses of the preceding chapter, where the Apostle reminds the Ephesians of the spiritual privileges and dignities with which they were invested, as members of the church of Christ. *Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God ; and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets,*

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord : in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. This, then, being their new position under the Gospel, he proceeds to speak of the manner in which his own mind was affected by the thought ; and urges upon them the solicitude he felt that they should act up to their high calling, and realize in their own individual experience, and their conscious advances toward spiritual perfection, the gracious purpose of Almighty God in calling them to his kingdom and glory. And here, in the warm effusion of his heart, he is carried away into a strain so impassioned and sublime, that we are almost afraid of approaching it, lest we should only weaken its force in attempting to illustrate it.

Everything in the entire passage is solemn and striking. How full of beauty and significance, for instance, is the manner in which he introduces it—*For this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*—I bow my kness. The language is expressive not merely of reverence, the profoundest reverence, the prostration of the whole man, *spirit and soul and body*, before God, but of fervent and prolonged supplication : supplication too, which was not a mere passionate movement, or an occasional act, but the Apostle's habitual

practice : *I bow my knees.* It seems also pretty distinctly to intimate that he did not content himself with what is called mental prayer—the silent indulgence of devout desire. Anxiety like his could not be satisfied with that. Slight and superficial feeling may well enough dispense with language, but strong feeling demands vocal utterance. Strong feeling must speak out. Strong feeling labours for strong expression, and delights in accumulating thought upon thought, emphasis upon emphasis, till thought and language can no further go. And certainly it is so in the burning words before us, which seem almost as if written in letters of fire, and in which we seem to hear the fervid breathings of the Apostle's spirit, glowing and soaring like the flame of the sacrifice.

* Observe, too, the peculiar aspect of the Deity to which he addresses himself. He approaches Almighty God, not in what we may call his *natural* character, as Absolute Sovereign of the universe, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all ; but in what we may call his *preternatural* character, as *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, in whom He has created us anew, begotten us again, restored to us our forfeited claim upon his paternal love and goodness, and through whom it therefore is that *we have* verse 12. *boldness and access with confidence unto Him.* God in nature, is *terrible majesty* : God in providence, is in- Job xxxvii. 22. *scrutable mystery* : God in the Gospel, is *the Father*

Ephes. i. 8. *of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him our Father—Infinite Goodness, and Infinite Love.*

And then, as the Apostle contemplates God in this benign and endearing aspect, his thoughts naturally expand into the consideration of the gracious comprehensiveness of the divine fatherhood; and the idea of the Church as a *domestic* society linking heaven and earth together, naturally presents itself to his mind. At the conclusion of the preceding chapter, when illustrating the privileges and dignities of the Christian calling, he variously represents the Church as a city, and as a temple, as well as a household; but when he *prays*, he comes before God in the filial spirit, and then the family feeling of Christianity is that which is uppermost in his mind. And thus he regards the saints in heaven and the faithful on earth, as only different portions of one great spiritual family. Place makes no distinction in their common relation to God and to each other. They are divided, but not disunited.

2 Cor. vi. 18. *They are all sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty:*
Gal. iii. 26 *children of God by faith in Christ Jesus: heirs of God,*
Rom. viii. 17. *joint-heirs with Christ:* Christ, the Elder Brother, and God, his Father and our Father, the great and glorious head of the whole household.

These things we rapidly hint without pausing to enlarge upon them, that we may look at the subject matter of the Apostle's prayer. *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.

Here, then, we see what a really supernatural and divine thing genuine practical Christianity is. *I can do all things*, says the Apostle, *through Christ which strengtheneth me*; but *without Me*, said ^{Philip. iv. 18.} our Lord to the disciples, *ye can do nothing*. No: ^{John xv. 5.} for this human nature of ours is in a fallen and disordered condition. There are the instincts and urgencies of the outward man, the animal and material nature; and there are those also of the inner man, the spiritual and immortal nature; and the spiritual, which ought to be the stronger, is the weaker; and the animal which ought to be in subjection to the spiritual, exercises a tyrannous mastery over it. For the good, the true, the pure, the heavenly, the divine, for all that tends to develop and strengthen the higher powers and capacities, to enlighten and elevate the reason and the conscience, and to make us men according to God's idea of a man—for all these things we have little affection, little relish. These things have lost their natural and rightful hold upon us. And though there is in us that which recognises its affinity with them, and their rightful authority over us; that which assents to the divine law, and affirms it to be *holy, just, and good*: that which yearns after ^{Rom. vii. 12.}

the spiritual and the divine, and which keeps us restless and discontented in the midst of material comforts and enjoyments: yet is it so borne down by the lamentable predominance of our lower nature, that *the good which we would we do not, and the evil which we would not, that we do*. Such is the recorded confession, not of the Apostle only, but of the thoughtful and the wise of all ages. All have felt and deplored their need of a strength far higher than their own, in order to attain even to that standard of duty which natural conscience of itself was able to discern. But the virtues and excellences proper to the Christian life—the *faith which worketh by love; the hope which, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, entereth into that within the veil; the charity that covers a multitude of sins, the meekness, the patience, the humility, the self-denial, the perseverance in well-doing, by which we are to illustrate and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*—these are as much above the attainment of our own unassisted powers, as the stars of heaven are beyond our reach. These things are the fruits and manifestations, not of anything naturally inherent in us, but of the influences and energies of God's own Spirit, acting immediately upon our spirits, lifting them up, and setting them free from their *captivity to the law of sin which is in our members; enabling us to mortify the deeds of the body, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, to control the*

Rom. vii. 19.

Gal. v. 6

Heb. vi. 19.

1 Pet. iv. 8.

Titus ii. 10.

Rom. vii. 23.

Rom. viii. 13.

Gal. v. 24.

insurgences of appetite and passion, and to reduce this rude, turbulent, disorderly nature of ours into a cheerful subjection to the voice of truth and duty. And in the Gospel, provision is made for this. It is emphatically and distinctively *the ministration of the Spirit* ; the ministration of divine light to the reason, divine strength to the conscience, and divine love to the affections ; and this by the influences of the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us, and so making us, in the language of St. Peter, *partakers of the divine nature*. And because it is a wonderful thing that God should actually vouchsafe to communicate his own Spirit to us, so that the Spirit of God dwelleth in these *our mortal bodies* just as really as our own spirits do ; because this is a thing, the mere possibility of which could never have entered into the imagination but for the express promise of God Himself, therefore does the Apostle pray that *according to the riches of his glory*,—according to the glorious affluence of his goodness and mercy, He would grant them to be *strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man* : language distinctly importing the Apostle's own deep sense of the unutterable marvellousness of the mercy for which he prayed.

Wonderful indeed it is to think of : but when God gives, He gives like Himself. He acts up to the royalty of his own perfections. He gives as He alone can give. And as He gave us his Son to save us, so He gives us his Spirit to sustain and strengthen

us; to nerve us for the duties and trials that daily come upon us, and for all that we may be called to do, or to suffer.

This active, invigorating presence of the Holy Spirit within us is, we say, to be strictly and literally understood; but when the Apostle proceeds to pray *that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith*, his language is evidently figurative. His meaning seems to be, that Christ might be the great object of their constant affection, and their constant trust: that everywhere, and in all things—in the daily pursuits and business of life, they might be actuated by an habitual, grateful sense of their obligations to Him, and their dependence upon Him; that the remembrance of Him, their divine Master and Redeemer—of what He was on earth and what He is in heaven, what He did, what He suffered, what He taught, what He promised, what He enjoined—that the remembrance of Him and his incomparable claims upon their love and service, might influence their whole character and conduct, and engage them in loving communion with Him, and earnest devotedness to Him. The Apostle's idea may be simply and familiarly illustrated by that sense of affectionate dependence, which enters so deeply into the faith and trust which a child reposes in his parent: or by the manner in which our concern for those with whom we are most closely connected in life, enters into and regulates all our thoughts

and feelings, our purposes and exertions. A man is not always thinking expressly about the individual members of his family ; but he carries them about with him in his heart, and all that he does has some reference, more or less direct, to them, and to their comfort and welfare. In a somewhat similar manner is Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith. He, in all his divine and human excellences, is so to be apprehended by our faith and affections, as to be the great central object, round which all our feelings turn, and to which all our efforts tend.

Now, to have Christ thus dwelling in the heart by faith, is to be *rooted and grounded*, confirmed and established *in love* to Him—a state of the affections indispensable to that increase in *knowledge*, for which the apostle goes on to pray :—*That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height*—the immeasurable dimensions of redeeming mercy ; reaching as it does from everlasting to everlasting, and embracing humanity in all ages, and nations, and conditions—*and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge !* But upon such a topic how shall we adequately speak ? The love of Christ which passeth knowledge ! Ay, truly, as the love of an infinite being must necessarily surpass the comprehension of all finite intelligence ! To know the love of Christ, to estimate it truly, we must

know the height from which He descended, and the depth to which He stooped; and all that He suffered
Is. xli. 11. during the long agony of his life, and *the travail of*
Heb. vii. 2. *his soul* when He *endured the cross, despising the shame.*

To know the love of Christ, we must know from what it is that He delivers, and to what it is that He exalts. We must grasp eternity; we must sound the depths of perdition; we must scale the throne of God Himself, and calculate the felicities of heaven. To know the love of Christ, we must know all the amount and variety of sympathy and
Heb. iv. 15. solicitude with which He, who is *not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, now cherishes and exercises for every individual member of his church, as yonder He sits exalted,
Eph. i. 22. *Head over all things.* To know the love of Christ—but let the Apostle speak of it himself—he who felt so deeply its constraining efficacy; let him speak of it, and let his language suffice; for nothing can be more expressive, nothing more emphatic,—*the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge!*

What we may observe and speak of with more precision, is the manner in which the Apostle connects increase in the *knowledge* of Christ's surpassing love, with our own establishment and growth in love. *That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ.*

This is perfectly true to nature and to Scripture. For nothing so opens the finer faculties as love. The intellect expands just as the affections warm and kindle: and accordingly we are told, that it was because the *heart* of Lydia was opened, *that she* Acts. xvi. 14. *attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.* Nothing, indeed, is so quick-sighted and so far-sighted as love. And not only so, but there are also truths and facts, which address themselves far more directly to the heart than to the intellect, and which are to be apprehended and known, not by the logical and speculative faculties, but only by the affections. Feeling is to be understood only by feeling. Love only can interpret love. And therefore it is said that *he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love;* 1 John iv. 8. whereas on the other hand, *every one that loveth is* 1. John iv. 7. *born of God, and knoweth God.* Contemplate the Cross with the cold dim eye of reason only, and there is a mystery about the great sacrifice which will for ever baffle and perplex; but contemplate that dread spectacle with the heart, and love fastens instantly upon that love of which it is the infinite expression, and finds in it relief from every difficulty, an answer to every doubt. And thus it is that Christ is to be known. The more we love, the more we know. The more we love Him, the more do we know, both speculatively and experimentally; that love of his *which passeth knowledge.*

The Apostle sums up all his anxieties in one vast

and all-comprehensive petition—*that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God!* But how are we to explain or illustrate this? Filled with *God!* Filled with the *fulness* of God! Filled with *all* the fulness of God! Filled with all that God can give and man receive: all of knowledge, all of love, all of comfort, all of blessedness, all that the heart of man, dilated and exalted by the energies of God's own Spirit, is capable of realizing! Ah! but this is only a lamentable enervation of the force of the Apostle's language, which we must leave therefore to speak for itself—*filled with all the fulness of God!*

Such is this wonderful prayer; and it is wound up with a doxology worthy of its sublimity: *Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be Glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.*

And here you will observe that this ascription of praise is addressed to God, not as *willing* to exceed all that we can ask or think—his disposition to do so being implied only, not expressed—but as *able* to act up to this gracious disposition; able to do, in us and for us, all, and immensely more than all, that we can ask or hope for. The thought in which the Apostle exulted is that God is not merely a Being of illimitable goodness, desiring and designing the everlasting welfare of his church, but that his power is as great as his mercy: and that as, in the

unspeakable gift of Christ, He has already vouchsafed an expression of mercy infinitely surpassing all possibility of previous conception, so now, the especial subject of Christian rejoicing is, that with this infinite love infinite power is associated, and that He is as able as He is willing to do for us all that his love may prompt Him to, and immeasurably to transcend all we can desire or conceive of blessedness. 2 Cor. ix. 15.

Among ourselves, many who are large in love, are very limited in power. Were their ability but equal to their disposition, not one of us would go unblest. But the good they would, they cannot do; and while, therefore, sure of their sympathy, we can place no faith in their succour. But He in whom St. Paul rejoiced, *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory*, was a Being of no such limited resources. No faith too implicit could be reposed in Him, *of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things*. The Apostle evidently labours for language large enough to express his sense of the boundlessness of the divine power to beatify and exalt. How indeed could it be otherwise? How could He *limit the Holy One of Israel*, when he looked back upon the history of the chosen people, and *remembered the years of the right hand of the Most High?* or when he referred to the glory of the ascended Saviour, and the mighty ministry of the Apostles under the inspiration and energy of his Rom. xi. 6. Ps. lxxviii. 41. Ps. lxxvii. 10.

Spirit? Other men, the philosophers and theorists of his day, like some sorry philosophers of our own, might well be confounded by the mysteries of providence, and the impossibility of reconciling the prevalence of evil with the supremacy of infinite Power and Goodness; but that was not a thing to shake Paul's faith. It might baffle his understanding; but instead of driving him into scepticism, or exciting him to impious disparagement of the divine perfections, it served only to heighten his conceptions of the Infinite and the Incomprehensible, and to prostrate him before Him in profounder homage.

O the depths, he exclaims, of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! The mysterious conflict between good and evil was at least as mysterious to him as to other men; perhaps, indeed, he had a livelier apprehension of its mysteriousness than most men—he, who declared that we wrestle, not merely against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places: but, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, he was not only enabled himself to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one, but to encourage others in the holy warfare with the triumphant assurance—The God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Yes; mysterious and distressing as might be the predominance of evil,

Rom. xi. 33.

Eph. vi. 12.

Eph. vi. 16.

Rom. xvi. 20.

he knew that it was only for a time, and that it was powerless against the purposes of *the God of Peace*.

If God be for us, he exultingly demands, who can be Rom. viii. 31.

against us? In Him and his omnipotence believing, he rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. 1. Pet. i. 8.

Shielded by his power, he felt secure from every foe and all calamity, and fearlessly could face a world in arms.

Such was St. Paul's own confidence in the Almightyness of God; and this strong confidence being the secret of his strength, and not of his only, but also of the strong in all ages of the church—for through this faith alone it was that they *subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises,* Heb. xi. 33. *stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens*—no wonder that to establish others in this faith should have been one of his chief anxieties. Of the Ephesian Church many were converts from heathenism, and to none of the heathen divinities had omnipotence ever been ascribed. All of them—even Jove himself—were regarded as beings of only limited power. Most natural, therefore, was the apostle's anxiety lest any such rude, injurious notions should still darken their minds, and hinder their faith in God's omnipotence and all-sufficiency. Hence, the stress which he lays upon this point in his prayer for them at the commencement of the epistle, *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the*

Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him ; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what

Eph. i. 17. *is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. Hence, too, the extraordinary emphasis with which he insists upon it in the doxology before us—unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us ! The Apostle, in his anxiety to raise their conceptions to the very highest, is not satisfied with declaring that the divine ability to bless is as large as our largest desires : no, it is above that ; above all that ; abundantly above all that ; ay, exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think—all that we can possibly desire or conceive ! And it is so, because the power that worketh in us is that very same power which not only raised Christ from the dead, but which also set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world but in that which is to come, and put all things under his feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body ! In all this sublime amplification of statement, this imposing enumera-*

tion of the celestial orders and hierarchies, and Christ's immeasurable exaltation above them all, the Apostle is evidently labouring to impress us, not merely with the majesty and authority with which Christ is invested, but yet more especially with *the immensity of the power* that thus infinitely exalted Him; and with the grand and ennobling consideration that *this God is our God for ever and ever*; that Ps. xlviii. 14. all this unbounded power, all his inexhaustible resources of *grace and glory*, are pledged to the Church Ps. lxxxiv. 11. which is Christ's body, even as unto Christ Himself, the Church's Head.

Here, then, was ground and warrant for the largest petitions. Great things the Apostle had been imploring for them; but he knew that there are greater things in store for us than even he, with all his rare experience, knew how to ask for. In all ages, indeed, God seems to have delighted in surpassing the expectations of his people, and doing for them *exceeding abundantly* above all they could have anticipated. *I had not thought to see thy face*, said Gen. xlviii. 11. the overjoyed old patriarch to his son Joseph, *and lo, God hath showed me also thy seed! It is his angel*, Acts. xii. 15. exclaimed the astonished and incredulous disciples, when St. Peter himself so unexpectedly appeared as the divine answer to their prayers for his deliverance. Typical surprises, these: touching displays of kindness and power which, extraordinary as they may seem, are not, however, without their parallels

in the experience of many. *When Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, Thou camest down; the*
Is. lxi. 8. 4. *mountains flowed down at Thy presence. For never have men heard, nor perceived by the ear, nor hath eye seen, a God beside Thee, who doeth such things for those that trust in him.** So sang Isaiah of the marvellous deliverances which God had wrought for his people in the days of old.—*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,*
1 Cor. ii. 9. *neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him!* So, in a similar strain of admiration, and adopting almost the language of the prophet, spake St. Paul of the things which *God hath revealed to us by his Spirit.* And so surely, with equal truth, may it be affirmed of those great things not seen as yet—
Rom. viii. 18. *the grace which is to be brought unto us, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, the glory which shall be revealed in us*
1 Pet. i. 13. *at the manifestation of the sons of God.—The power that worketh in us is even now forming within us those dispositions, and tastes, and capacities, by which we are to be made meet for the glory of his inheritance in the saints: but what that glory is we can no more imagine now, than we could form an idea of the properties of matter, or of the order and beauty of the material creation, without senses to perceive them. Even the imagery by which it is pictured to us in the Scriptures, being only, with all*

* See Bishop Lowth's "Translation of Isaiah."

its brilliancy, a condescension to our present modes of thinking, must be all as inadequate to convey to us any conception of what that inheritance itself is, as a mere map of the world to convey any notion of the wonders of the earth and sea. The reality of the glory to be revealed will as much surpass any possible representation of it now, as the magnificence of an Alpine region surpasses the petty indications of it in the traveller's chart. All, indeed, of grandeur and beauty that we behold around us now, being rather *the hiding*, than the discovery, *of his power*, all Hab. iii. 4. that we now can ask or think is but as nothing to what the power of God can yet do, and what, under the prompture of his infinite love, it will do *for them that love Him*. And ever throughout eternity will this be so. Fresh scenes and sources of felicity must ever be at the command of his omnipotence: and whatever, therefore, the enlargement of our capacities, the variety of our experience, or the range and sweep of our perceptions, in every successive stage of our immortality will He still, as ever, *be able to do exceeding abundantly above all that even then we can ask or think!* To his omnipotence there can be no limit, even as to his eternity no end.

And *this God is our God for ever and ever!* Ps. xlviii. 14. Terrible to his enemies—to them, indeed, *a consuming* Heb. xii. 29. *fire*—to the humblest believer He is strength and salvation, and to the Church Universal its glory and defence. Ever, therefore, throughout all past ages

of the Church, has this been a theme of grateful exultation. The apostle, in his noble ascription of praise, is but evidencing his oneness of spirit with the saints of old. *O clap your hands, all ye people!* was their jubilant summons in celebration of some signal deliverance—*Shout unto God with the voice of triumph! For the Lord most high is terrible; He is a great king over all the earth. Sing praises unto God, sing praises! Sing praises unto our king, sing praises! For God is the king of all the earth! Sing ye praises with understanding!* Small indeed was the people's sympathy then with the holy enthusiasm of the church: and but little of these praises is even now to be heard. Feeble only as yet is the sound which the church below sends up, to mingle with the anthems and acclamations of the heavenly choirs. Faint only the voice with which it echoes those triumphant songs! But the day is coming,—however slowly, it is coming—when earth as well as heaven shall resound with the universal chorus! *I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*

Oh, to bear but the humblest part in that grand thunder-peal of praise!

Let then the spirit of praise inspire me now, and

my life be a psalm of thanksgiving! Here it is, and only here, amidst the discords and disturbances of this troublesome world, often too in weariness and deep dejection, that we learn that new song which the church triumphant will sing in everlasting strains. Here, only here! Tune then my heart, Most Gracious Saviour, into perfect harmony with thine! And O my soul, praise thou the Lord!

NOW UNTO HIM THAT IS ABLE TO DO FOR US EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY ABOVE ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US, UNTO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH BY CHRIST JESUS THROUGHOUT ALL AGES, WORLD WITHOUT END. AMEN.

LEAMINGTON:

PRINTED BY DAVID SARNEY, REGENT STREET.



